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SECULAR INSTITUTES

SECULAR INSTITUTES AND OTHER
VOCATIONS IN THE CHURCH

George v. Lobo

SECULARITY OF SECULAR INSTITUTES

Subhash Anand

SECULAR INSTITUTES AND CONTEMPLATION

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PROBLEMS OF SECULAR INSTITUTES

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THE THEOLOGY OF SECULAR INSTITUTES

Felix Podimattam

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The Fulness of Life

SECULAR INSTITUTES

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Editorial

Secular Institutes (S.Is) are one of the most noteworthy developments in the modern Church. The vitality and dynamism present in this movement is, in fact, a pointer to its providential nature. The phenomenon of the Catholic faithful practising the evangelical counsels while living in the world, is undoubtedly a new glory to the Church. Whether one is a lawyer or a butcher, a professor or a baker, a factory worker or a farmer, one can be a consecrated person in his own environment. Lay men and women have ample opportunity for launching a splendid apostolic action in the S.Is.

Unfortunately S.Is are very little known in our country. Their impact in India has so far been far from impressive. In fact, they are hardly understood here except by those who are immediately concerned with them. Most people, including clergy and religious, find it hard to classify members of S.Is according to their familiar categories. General information about them if at all available, is often inaccurate. Public reaction towards them is generally tinged with suspicion. Oddly enough, India which is so fertile in seminaries and religious congregations lags behind in understanding the importance of this contemporary and pertinent way of Christian life and apostolic action.

Understandably, there is a telling need for accurate information concerning S.Is and for a measure of publicity regarding their real nature and significance. The present issue of *Jeevadhara* makes a modest attempt to meet such a need. To begin with, George V.Lobo compares S.Is with other vocations in the Church and concludes that this widespread spontaneous movement is a God-given answer to some of the most deeply felt aspirations of our times. Subhash Anand turns his attention to one of the key characteristics of S.Is, namely their

secularity and pleads that it be scrupulously adhered to in life by all the S.I. members. Aleyamma Abraham, in a complementary article, underseores the other key characteristic of S.Is, that is to say, consecration with special reference to contemplation. Gracy Ottapallil, after analyzing some of the crucial problems of S.Is especially in the Indian context, suggests possible solutions. The sectional editor winds up the whole exercise with a theological overview about the nature of S.Is. May these modest efforts contribute to a better understanding of and appreciation for S.Is on the part of all concerned.

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Secular Institutes and Other Vocations in the Church

Introduction

So far, the universal call to holiness of all the baptized and the total gamut of vocations in the Church have not been sufficiently appreciated. Either there is lack of understanding of the basic call to holiness of all the faithful, or the relationship of special vocations with this universal call has not been clearly seen.

Vocation promoters themselves are not fully aware of the various forms of consecrated life. Hence it is not surprising that a candidate who would have fitted better in a secular institute lands up in a religious congregation and vice versa. Religious brotherhood, the permanent diaconate and secular institutes are the vocations particularly devalued, especially in India.

It is heart-rending to see so many people in the wrong place like square pegs. Either they languish in the situation they are in or just abandon the idea of any special consecrated vocation. Superiors and formators, instead of saying that a person is not suited to their particular way of life and helping him or her to find the right way are inclined just to discard him or her. At times, there is a stage of increased conflict and bitterness because of which choice of another consecrated vocation is no more possible.

Proper discernment is to be made, as far as possible, before entry. However, mistakes are possible. The law allows the transfer from one religious congregation to another with the permission of the respective superior generals (C. 684, 1). A transfer between a religious congregation and a secular institute and vice versa can be effected by permission of the

Holy See (C. 684, 5). The institutes themselves must strike a balance between not easily admitting people who have been trained in another way of life and would find it difficult to readjust, and the good of the particular person who now really needs transfer and may well be able to readjust. Destabilisation of the new institute can be prevented by careful discernment and prudent management of each case. There should be no swing such as between rash admission of members from other institutes and then total rejection of any such members. Those who are concerned with such cases would do well to reflect what would have happened if they themselves were victims of improper discernment earlier.

Universal call to holiness

As Vatican II affirms: "Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation (the sacraments), *all the faithful*, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby, the Father Himself is holy."¹

Today, it is more than ever important to note that every Christian whether lay, religious, priest or bishop belongs to the People of God, and as such is called to live the same divine life, exercising the same common priesthood of the faithful and to witness to Christ before the world. It is false to set up a two-tier spirituality, one of the commandments for the laity and the other of the counsels for the religious. The evangelical or gospel counsels were addressed to all the disciples of Christ, although there is a difference in the manner of observing them.

Further, every Christian receives the call to holiness in a personal way. The initiative comes from God alone. To this corresponds the free human response. We see this dynamic in the various vocation stories in the Old and New Testaments. The danger of overinstitutionalizing this personal relationship is to be countered by stressing personal commitment in the life of every Christian. Some degree of institutionalisation of vocations is inevitable in an organized ecclesial community. However, the personal dimension of Christian life and worship is to be brought out. Besides, every Christian must be helped to discern his or her personal charism.

When we talk about the universal call to holiness, it is very important to note what Christian holiness is. In the past, there has been too much stress on piety and conformism leading to formalism. This is only a caricature of genuine Christian spirituality. This, as Teilhard de Chardin has shown, is the 'spiritualization of all that is human'. It is the imbuing of human activity with the spirit of the gospel. Hence, it implies a strong counter-cultural aspect challenging the dominant consumerist and competitive values of capitalist society. It also implies a liberation from the feudal stratified society in India where the dominant elements hold on to their positions of power and invent ever new ways of exploiting the underprivileged.

Christian holiness today has to be understood in the context of Christ's messianic mission as it is delineated in his inaugural proclamation at the synagogue in Nazareth (Lk 4:16-21) and its fulfilment according to the vision of John: "neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 2:1-4). This is all the more relevant to the call to secular institutes.

Varieties of vocations

As already noted, every Christian has his or her own particular vocation which is unique. Each one is called to respond to God's grace in a unique way and also to bring one's unique contribution to the realization of the Kingdom. But here we will be dealing with socially recognized vocations.

Some of these are *life vocations* and others are *career vocations* or professions. The latter like teaching and medical service can be realized by people in different life vocations unless some of them like business and direct political activity are considered incompatible with priesthood or religious life (CC. 285-287).

1. The ordinary life vocation is *marriage* and family life. The sacrament of matrimony is a vital sharing in the mystery of Christ and the Church (Eph 5:32). It is in the family milieu of what is known as the 'domestic church'², that the majority of Christians are called to exercise their call to baptismal holiness and the apostolate.

It is generally accepted that the abundance of vocations in India to the consecrated states has been largely due to a healthy family atmosphere. Unless this is maintained and developed in a new situation, attempts to foster special vocations will not bear much fruit. The celibate vocation is meaningful only when it is understood as a positive renunciation of marriage so that the values of the latter are realized in a deeper way.

2. *Ministerial Priesthood* is a call to spiritual leadership in the Church, representing the headship of Jesus Christ. Its primary function is the authoritative proclamation of the Gospel leading to the celebration of the sacraments and guidance of the faithful in their Christian life. It is not a position of power, but a call to service after the example of Christ who came "to serve and not to be served" (Mt 20:28).

3. *Permanent Diaconate*. For a long time, the diaconate, especially in the Western Church, was considered merely as a stepping stone to the presbyterate. Now Vatican II has restored the permanent diaconate. The order can now be conferred on married men of mature age which is generally interpreted as at least 30. The presence of the diaconate can be a powerful sign in the Church that all the ranks of the clergy are called to *diakonia* or service. Married deacons could well serve as a link between the priests and the laity.

4. While the clergy, (bishops, priests and deacons) are distinguished from the laity by divine institution³, from these some are called to live the evangelical counsels in a special way⁴. The Code groups them under *consecrated states*. This is a call to live the radicality of the gospel demands in an organized way in different forms.

The most widely recognized among the consecrated states is *religious life*, either in institutes more strictly *contemplative* or in those more directly *dedicated to the works of the apostolate*. Religious life points to the supremacy of God over all things. It implies a prophetic denunciation of all oppressive structures and a prophetic annunciation or witness of a new humanity. According to the new Code, it is characterized by (a) public vows; (b) distinct life style; (c) common life at least in principle (C. 607,2).

We then have *secular institutes*. According to Vatican II, though not religious communities, "they carry with them in the world a profession of the evangelical counsels which is genuine and complete, and recognized as such by the Church. This profession confers a consecration on men and women, laity and clergy, who reside in the world"⁵. There also are some (celibate) *lay societies* which are quite similar to secular institutes.

Besides, there are *societies of apostolic life* which resemble religious institutes. The members live in common and pursue an apostolic purpose without taking religious vows (C. 731,1).

As regards the religious state, there is need for recognizing the special place of *brotherhoods* in which men live religious life in what may be called the 'pure' state. They can provide a powerful witness of fraternity in the world. The rightful place of *brothers in clerical institutes* must also be recognized.

There is also the option of being a *consecrated virgin* without belonging to any institute, but being at the heart of the Church (C. 604) or of being a dedicated *hermit* according to the ancient tradition (C. 103).

Finally, the Code asks bishops to discern and promote entirely new forms of consecrated life (C. 605). Indian *Ashrams* would be a good example.

So there is a wide variety of officially recognized consecrated states. We may also mention the possibility of a *dedicated single life* without any formal status or of *widowhood*.

Secular institutes then must find their place amidst this wide variety of vocations in the Church.

Specific nature of secular Institutes

Secular institutes are a new phenomenon in the Church. They arouse spontaneously due to the need for consecrated persons acting as leaven⁷ in the world by living in a secular situation. It is the merit of Pope Pius XII to have recognized this unique vocation in the Church as early as 1947, in his Apostolic Constitution, *Provida Mater*⁶. By this approbation and encouragement, he has indeed manifested the role of the Church as a 'provident mother' for the needs of the time. A year later, the Pope expressed more clearly their secular character as *Christians living in the world*⁷.

Pope Paul VI, on the 25th anniversary of *Provida Mater* described secular institutes as "a happy synthesis of a *full consecration of life* according to the evangelical counsels and a *full responsibility* for a transforming presence⁸.

Secular institutes try to combine *consecrated life* with a fully *secular life*. This is a seeming paradox as 'secular' and 'religious' are often understood as mutually exclusive. As Pope Paul VI puts it: Your *consecrated life*, in the spirituality of the evangelical counsels, is the expression of your undivided loyalty to Christ and the Church, of the permanent and radical striving toward holiness, and of the awareness that in the final analysis it is Christ alone who carries on with His grace the work of redemption and transformation in the world. It is in the depths of your hearts that the world is consecrated to God...Your *secular character* urges you, unlike the religious, to emphasize particularly your relationship to the world. This is not just a sociological condition, an external fact, but an attitude: to be present in the world, to know you are responsible serving it so as to shape it, according to God, in a more just and more human order, and thereby sanctify it from within"⁹.

In order to fulfil their vital role in the Church and the world, secular institutes must preserve their unique identity. Vatican II desires that "these institutes should preserve their proper and particular character, a *secular one*, so that they may everywhere measure up successfully to that apostolate which they were designed to exercise, and which is both *in the world* and, in a sense, *of the world*"¹⁰. On the other hand, they must retain their *consecrated character*. They are not just any other lay group, but try to live out the evangelical counsels in a special way, according to the charism of each institute. Deep union with God is the basis of their involvement in secular affairs so that they would be able to transform the world and not be conformed to it.

Hence it would be improper for an institute to call itself 'secular' when it is in fact 'religious' with all the essential elements of religious life. Although reality is complex, and secular institutes may display a rightful pluralism, blurring the distinction between the two vocations can only lead to

confusion. This would be good neither for secular institutes nor for religious and would be unhelpful for vocation discernment. Here and there we do in fact meet with the so-called 'secular' institutes' whose whole way of life is indistinguishable from religious, (even of the stricter kind!), except perhaps for a touch of jewelry! Such groups must clarify their position and opt more clearly for either of the two states of life.

'Secularity', as Pope Paul VI remarked, is above all an *attitude*. But it has to express itself in some external form. Some points might be discussed.

The life of the evangelical counsels is to be undertaken by certain *sacred bonds* established by the constitutions (C. 712). If it is through vows, these are not supposed to be strictly 'public'¹¹. However, they are not entirely 'private' either¹². The present practice regulating dispensation from the sacred bonds made in secular institutes "points to the public nature of these bonds in the technical sense of their being verifiable, without compromising the discretion and confidentiality frequently practised by institute members"¹³.

The consecrated life of members in these institutes is not marked by any "separation from the world" which is required of religious in however flexible a manner, "according to the character and purpose of each institute" (C. 607, 3). Their life-style will be essentially secular, but reflecting the whole mode of living consistent with their consecration and radical following of Christ.

Close communion among members of the same institute is essential to their calling to live the evangelical life in an organized ecclesial way. This would be actualized in unity of the same spirit, sharing the same charism and identity of the same mission (even though carried out in a different way by each member), and by mutual contacts and collaboration in the life of the institute. The Code brings this out in various canons.

C.602 speaks of 'fraternal life' proper to each institute of consecrated life. "This union of members, rooted and based in charity, is to be an example of universal reconciliation in Christ." Regarding application of this principle to secular institutes, the Code demands that "members of the same institute are to preserve a rapport with one another, carefully

fostering a unity of spirit and a genuine fraternity ' (C. 716). Regarding residence, it is said: "Members are to live their lives in the ordinary conditions of the world, either alone, in their families or in fraternal groups." (C. 714)

It is clear that 'fraternal life' of the group is not to be understood in the same way as that of religious community. Living together in fraternal groups may be called forth by circumstances of time or place, as for women in India. But unless there is a clear distinction between the requirements of community life for religious and secular institutes, there would be confusion regarding the identity of the latter.

Role of secular Institutes in the Church

Pope Paul VI, in his address of 1972, points out the deep and providential connection between the charism of secular institutes and one of the clearest and most important trends of Vatican II: the Church's presence in the world. "In fact, the Church has strongly emphasized the various aspects of her relationship with the world, that she is part of the world, that she is destined to serve it ... as a leaven and as a kind of soul of human activity. Therefore, she has an interest in the profound nature and mission whose roots plunge into the mystery of the Word Incarnate."¹⁴

The Pope points out that "a tragic gap has arisen between technical, scientific progress and the growth of faith in the living God". In this situation, secular institutes, by virtue of their charism of consecrated life in the world, appear as providential instruments for embodying the secular mission of the Church. They have the exciting mission of "being a model giving an indefatigable impetus to the new relationship that the Church is trying to embody before the world and in the service of the world"¹⁵.

Hence secular institutes in a unique way witness to the insertion of the Church in the world, sharing "the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of men of this age"¹⁶. They remind all the members of the Church of the precise state of the world: created for man out of love, sharing in the fall of man as well as in his redemption in Christ. The *saeculum* is the present real world which has been subjugated to the reign of sin and death, but which preserves its basic goodness

and in being "set free from the bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Rom 8:20). Every Christian, according to his or her particular state, has to participate in this liberation for the transformation of the world. This witness and challenge to the whole Church is the primary significance of secular institutes. Pope Paul VI has expressed this strongly: "They will be an experimental laboratory in which the Church tests the concrete bonds of its relations with the world."¹⁷

'Secularity' of secular institutes, we have seen, not only indicates the condition of life in the world, but also an attitude of apostolic commitment that takes into account the values of temporal realities and acts from them in order to impregnate them with an evangelical spirit.

Belonging to a secular institute does not change the clerical or lay state of the members. Speaking to lay members, Pope John Paul II remarked: "You must be above all, real disciples of Christ. As members of a secular institutes you have to work to be such by the radicalism of your commitment to follow the evangelical counsels in such a way that, not only does it not change your state — you are and remain lay people — but that it strengthens it, in the sense that your secular state will be consecrated, that it will be more demanding, and that the commitment in the world and for the world which is implied by the secular state, will be permanent and faithful."¹⁸

The Code expresses the idea thus: "Lay members participate in the evangelising mission of the Church in the world and from within the world. They do this by their witness of christian life and of fidelity to their consecration, and by the assistance they give in directing temporal affairs to God and in animating the world by the power of the Gospel. They also offer their co-operation to serve the ecclesial community in accordance with the secular manner of life proper to them." (C. 713, 2)

As lay people then, they will be involved in the fullest sense in the civic, professional and social responsibilities that belong properly to the laity. As Vatican II puts it: "The laity by their vocation seek the Kingdom of God, by engaging in

temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God.”¹⁹ As called “to work for the sanctification of the world from within”²⁰, they are not bound by the restrictions placed on the activities of priests and religious regarding political activity, civil and secular offices and commerce (CC. 285-287). Rather, as C. 225, 2 states, they are, according to the condition of each “to permeate and perfect the temporal order of things with the spirit of the Gospel. In this way, particularly in conducting secular business and exercising secular functions, they are to give witness to Christ”.

Obviously, they can also fulfil all religious and ecclesiastical roles now open to the laity. Some institutes may have a specific apostolate like medical service. But more frequently and normally, the members will be engaged in diverse apostolates, each bringing the quality of one's consecration to the particular field. Such inspiration and witness is now all the more necessary because of the widespread corruption in secular life. The institute will form the members' consciousness to maturity, openness and dedication and prepare them to be involved with zeal and evangelical detachment in the various spheres of activity.

The anonymity which several institutes often observe makes the apostolate more effective. It enables the members to act as leaven in society without provoking defensive reactions. However, as secular institutes are organized bodies, the danger of misuse of power and influence in a hidden way cannot be denied. Thus there has been a widespread questioning about the activities of some *Opus Dei* members occupying powerful positions in Fascist Spain and later in Latin American dictatorships. Before a definitive judgement is made, there would be need for greater investigation. But all reports about the matter cannot be dismissed out of hand²¹. The particular members, or the institute itself might have intended to fight the evil of communism as they saw it. But the effects on the poor and the underprivileged have to be evaluated.

Relation with other vocations

Members of secular institutes should be grateful for their unique vocation. But they should also respect and ap-

preciate other vocations in the Church, learn from them as well as challenge them.

1) Lay members, as we have seen, will realize their complete solidarity with the *laity*. While appreciating their own celibate call, they will value the dignity of marriage and family life. Their consecrated celibacy should be a sign to married people of the transcendent dimension of every vocation in the Church. Marriage has the deepest incarnational dimension inasmuch as the love of God is experienced in the very sexual experience of the intimacy between the partners. However, celibacy points to the need for transcendence. It manifests that ultimate fulfilment can be found only beyond the present form of earthly realities. True carnal love finds its meaning only in going beyond self-seeking to total dedication to God through the partner.

Members of secular institutes living the life of the evangelical counsels in the secular situation show that the counsels as taught by the Lord in the Beatitudes are addressed to all the faithful. The laity too are called to evangelical perfection. They have to realize the fulness of Christian life in their particular situation.

2) Regarding *diocesan priests*, secular institutes will witness to the nobility of their *secular* vocation. Until recently, the term 'secular' was often understood in a derogatory way. So priests who do not belong to religious congregations have come to be known as 'diocesan' which poses its own problems. First of all, it looks as if religious priests, even those engaged in directly pastoral works, are not 'diocesan'. Then, the specific vocation of non religious priests tends to be obscured. They are more or less assimilated to religious priests although the conditions of their life and apostolate are often quite different. Even the training lacks in specificity. Once 'secular' is understood in a positive way, it would be easier for them to discover their 'secularity' and proper role. Shedding their excessive sacral image, they would be able to lead the faithful more effectively 'from within'.

Clerical members of secular institutes have a witnessing mission of being 'priests among priests'. As Pope John Paul II

put it: their role is "to bring to the diocesan presbytery, not only a life experience according to the evangelical counsels and with a supporting community, but also with a clear feeling for the Church-world relationship"²².

At the 1970 International Congress of Secular Institutes, 1971, a group of priest members expressed their secular vocation thus: "To build the world, therefore, to make a more fraternal, free and joyous humanity. He participates in this construction and he is thus secular — in the sense that has proximity to the world — in the measure in which he works in close communion with the laity."²³

Normally, priest members will not, according to the prescriptions of canon law, be involved directly in the commercial and political fields. However, they will exercise a ministerial action through education and animation.

3) Regarding *religious life*, secular institutes will experience a solidarity because of the consecration to live the evangelical life. By the witness of closer community life of the religious, they will be inspired to live a deep fraternal life among the members as well as with others. The greater detachment called for in religious life will point to the ultimate transcendence of secular life. On the other hand, secular institutes will suggest to the religious that their life is not to be an alienation, but a deeper solidarity with the world. The Religious, active or contemplative, are called, each in one's own way, to share in the transformation of the world. The renunciation of the religious is not a negation, but a deeper appreciation of true secular values and their redirection to the ultimate end that is God and His Kingdom of love and justice. Thus it will appear that every vocation in the Church is a dedication to these values of *love and justice*.

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Footnotes

1. *Lumen Gentium*, N. 1.
2. Vatican II, *ibid*.

3. *Lumen Gentium*, N. 43; C. 207, 1.
4. *Lumen Gentium*, N. 46; C. 207, 2.
5. *Perfectae Caritatis*, N. 11.
6. *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 39 (1947) 114-124.
7. *Motu Proprio, Primo Feliciter, Acta Apostolicae Sedis*, 40 (1948) 283-286.
8. Address to Secular Institutes, 2 February, 1972. See *The Pope Speaks*, 17 (1972) 27-28.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.
10. *Perfectae Caritatis*, N. 11.
11. *Provida Mater*, II, 1.
12. S. Canalis, "De Institutis Saecularibus: Doctrina et Praxis", *Monitor Ecclesiasticus*, 79 (1949) 156.
13. *The Code of Canon Law*, ed. by J. A. Coriden et alii, London, Chapman, 1985, p. 527.
14. *The Pope Speaks*, p. 28
15. *Ibid.*; p. 29.
16. Vatican, *Gaudium et Spes*, N. 1
17. Discourse to International Congress of Secular Institutes, 25 August 1976, *Osservatore Romano*, 16 September 1976, p. 2.
18. To the Third World Congress of Secular Institutes, 28 August 1980, *Osservatore Romano*, 29 September 1980, p. 4.
19. *Lumen Gentium*, N. 31.
20. Pope John Paul II, 28 August 1980, *Osservatore Romano*, 29 September 1980, p. 4.
21. The recent work, *The Secret of Opus Dei*, by M. Walsh, Grafton, 1988.
22. *Osservatore Romano*, 29 September 1980, p. 4.
23. *Acta Congressus Internationalis Institutorum Saecularium*, Milan 1971, p. 204.

The Secularity of Secular Institutes

Allow me to begin on a personal note. For over ten years now I have been associated with the Secular Institutes (S. Is) in India in some way or the other. My overall impression is that most of them have a long way to go before they fully realize their secularity, both as individuals and as institutes. It is also my impression that the vast majority of the people for whom or with whom they work—and I am not thinking only of the theologically uneducated laity—do not understand the specific mission of the S. Is. This does create some very serious problems. Attempts to move towards authentic secularity come as a threat to some of the members themselves. This is because they joined with defective ideas about the S. Is. They thought it was a way of life for those who wanted to be “nuns in saris”¹, or for those who for some reason or the other did not or could not get married, but still wanted the warmth and security of family life. The opposition comes also from well-intentioned churchmen. They are inclined to believe that people will be lost if they tried to be fully secular, or that the institutionalized Church will lose some good workers if the members of the S. Is are allowed to serve in non-Church sites.

Yet if the S. Is are to fulfil their specific role in the Church then it is imperative that they and church-leaders understand and appreciate the true meaning of their life. This is important for the individual members of the S. Is, because they can be truly happy in the S. Is only by fully living their vocation there. This is important for the S. Is as institutes if they are to be “in today’s Church as a beautiful spring time full of hope and promise”². This is important for the Church at large, because through them the Church can hope to fulfil a task that is urgent and yet cannot be fulfilled by others.

It was for this reason that Pope Pius XII saw "the hand of God with the emergence" of these institutes³.

Development in the understanding of secularity

If there is so much misunderstanding about the true meaning of secularity, it is partly the result of lack of clarity in the official documents of the Church. This, in a way, is to be expected, because the S. Is are a new phenomenon, still struggling to find their identity within the Church. Even though they are found from the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Code of Canon Law of 1917 does not say anything about them. The first official pronouncement comes from Pius XII in 1947, who says that the S. Is are neither religious orders nor congregations, nor even societies of common life⁴. Speaking about their apostolate, this is what he says:

These Institutes also open the way to many forms of apostolate and service in times, places and circumstances from which priests and religious are excluded by the nature of their calling, or which for other reasons are not accessible to them⁵.

Thus, there are some services that priests and religious cannot render from the very nature of things. There are other services which they should render, but from which they are excluded due to some particular circumstances. The Pope suggests that the S. Is take up these too. Thus the S. Is would be expected to take up ministries that belong properly to priests or religious. That would make them crypto-clerics or crypto-religious.

The Second Vatican Council is not completely free of uncertainty in this matter. The S. Is are spoken of in the document dealing with the religious⁶, even though the Council has one full document on the laity⁷. Similarly in the document on the mission of the Church, the S. Is are mentioned in the paragraph that pertains to the religious, and not in the following paragraph which talks about the mission of the laity⁸. Thus though the Council explicitly says that "the institutes themselves should preserve their own proper, i.e., secular character"⁹, yet when talking about them it groups them with the religious.

Gradually the lay character of the S. Is begins to be asserted. Already in 1972, addressing the heads of S. Is, Paul VI said

You are lay people, consecrated as lay people by baptism and confirmation, but you have chosen to underline your consecration to God with the profession of the evangelical counsels... You are still lay people, committed to the secular values of the lay state of life (*Lumen Gentium*, 31) but with you it is a matter of "consecrated secularity", you are both secular, living as lay people in the world and consecrated¹⁰.

The recent Synod on the laity takes up this trend of thought. The *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod reminds us that "the unique contribution by the secular institutes in the mission of the Church needs to be emphasized"¹¹. In his post-synodal apostolic exhortation, John Paul II says:

The Church's rich variety is manifested still further from within each state of life. Thus *within the lay state* diverse "vocations" are given, that is, there are different paths in the spiritual life and the apostolate which are taken by individual members of the lay faithful. In the field of a "commonly shared" lay vocation "special" lay vocations flourish. In this area we can also recall the spiritual experience of the flourishing of diverse forms of secular institutes that have developed recently in the Church¹².

Thus the S. Is are given their proper place: they are members of the laity. But the uncertainty is not fully cleared, because in the very next line the Pope speaks of S. Is for priests! Here too the Pope notes that as a matter of fact there are institutes of priests that claim to be S. Is.

Christian presence in the world

Our discussion on the secularity of the S. Is begins with the presupposition that the S. Is are lay movements, and so their secularity is the secularity of the laity. In the text cited above, Paul VI recalls the Council document on the Church, and so it is to this that we now turn. This is how the Council understands the laity:

What specially characterizes the laity is their secular nature.. But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of

God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven¹³.

From this the following become clear: 1) Secularity is the specific character of the laity. 2) This secularity means not only working in the temporal sphere as their primary concern; 3) but also living as other ordinary humans do. 4) This mission is to be fulfilled from within the world, i.e., not as an institution distinct from it, but as leaven lost in it. 5) The obligation to work in the temporal sphere is a sacred vocation. If temporal commitment is the very vocation of the laity, and if priests "are by reason of their particular vocation especially and professedly ordained to the sacred ministry"¹⁴, then the present writer fails to see how there can be S. Is for priests. I am inclined to think that this involves a contradiction in terms!

The laity is called by God to be involved in the temporal sphere. The world is God's creation, and so it is holy. God wants man to share in His creative act "so that created goods may be perfected by human labour, technical skill and civic culture for the benefit of all men according to the design of the Creator"¹⁵. Thus the sacredness of the secular is not absolute (*parama-artha*), but is found in its sub-servience (*vyavahāra*) to human welfare, which can be fully safeguarded only by man's openness to God's redeeming love. Thus the temporal has a *vyāvahārika-artha*. In the context of commitment to the temporal, this means not merely that man *may* use the things of this world to love God and man, but man *ought* to use and develop the things of the world as a sign of his love for God and man.

This, however, does not primarily mean technical competence, which is very much needed. If the temporal has its real meaning only in love, then the secular commitment first

and foremost means a presence of love in the heart of the world. The emphasis, then, is not on action but on presence, not on competence but on authenticity, not on results but on dedication, not on institutions but on persons. The secular commitment means that one is not just *for* the others but *with* the others in their day to day struggle. In this way the secular commitment is also the continuation of the mystery of salvation, the mystery of God becoming Emmanuel. It is the presence from within of God's humanizing love. This is the first task of the members of the S. Is: to become the heart of our God in the heart of the world, allowing God to make His own "the joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted"¹⁶.

The presence of a loving person in the heart of the world means the acceptance of the reality of human freedom, which is the creative force of human history. To be in the temporal is to be in human history. The secular commitment involves a tension: the longing to bring God's love to all, and yet the stark reality of exploitation which is the result not merely of ignorance and human weakness, but also of real sin, of really bad will. One is then tempted to use manipulation or force. This will violate the sacredness of the human person. Today when manipulation and violence is the order of the day, the members of the S. Is will live their secularity in love which is by its very nature non-manipulative and non-violent but hopeful. Secular commitment calls for *ahimsā*.

To be effectively in the heart of the world, to serve as leaven which transforms the milieu, the members of the S. Is must be fully rooted in the culture of their place, without becoming obscurantist or compromising the Gospel values. The secular commitment demands deep inculturation. If the transforming presence is from within, then the resources needed to bring about this transformation must be from within. What is important is not quick changes brought about by outside forces, but changes which can be sustained from within. This means that the members of the S. Is have faith in the people with whom they find themselves. Love implies faith and hope. The Incarnation, God's presence in the heart of the world, is not only God's love for, but also His faith and hope in man.

The secular task of the church

As members of the laity, the S. Is are primarily called to be involved in the temporal realities. Hence such institutes whose primary mission is "within the christian communities, the service of the priesthood"¹⁷, or whose main work is in the catechetical field¹⁸, or other similar concern, will need to rethink their constitutions if they wish to continue as S.Is. This is what Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti said in his opening address to the International Congress of the S. Is in 1970:

If therefore any Secular Institute, perhaps under the influence of local feeling about the traditional structures of Religious Life, has receded to any extent from the clear teachings of *Provida Mater*, *Primo Feliciter*, and *Cum Sanctissimus*, it should re-assess the situation and return to the sources of its life which are the rulings of these three documents¹⁹.

May I add: and of the subsequent documents! As I said earlier, it is not easy to understand secularity, more so since for many this is a "new" idea. We do have S. Is engaged in the traditionally hallowed areas of formal education and health services. But there are many others, perhaps more urgent, that should be the concern of the S. Is: fine arts, mass media, creative literature, healthy journalism, labour relations, politics etc.

The commitment to the temporal does not merely mean the type of work the members of the S. Is do, but also the context of that work. It must be secular, so that the S. Is operate from within the world. Hence to say that "as a special character of secularity, we do not have any Institution of our own but work in the Institutions of the diocese"²⁰ does not sound very convincing. It is true, the S. Is should not have any institution of their own. That would isolate them and then they would cease to be the leaven that can operate only by getting lost in the dough. For the same reason, they should not work in church-run schools, hospitals, social service centres, etc. There are enough priests and religious to take care of that. We need consecrated people in government-run schools, hospitals, social service centres etc. We — those who operate in Church institutions — are well known for the way we criticise these institutions. We are so conscious of our own standards!

There is another reason why the S. Is should neither

have their own institutions, nor take up work in Church institutions, much less be responsible for them. Once a commitment is made to an institution by the S. Is, then there is the constant anxiety of keeping the labour supply going. Hence the constant concern for numbers. This has made many religious congregations appear more as sources of cheap labour than as schools for christian perfection. They recruit "vocations", which means they recruit workers for the institutions for which they are responsible. In the process the quality of religious commitment goes down. The novice-master of a religious congregation for men once told me that he was ordered by his major superior to make sure that a certain number of novices are promoted to the first vows every year. But when the S. Is work in government-run institutions, they do not have to worry as to who will take their place when they retire. That they could leave to God and to the government. The life of the S. Is presupposes a very high degree of Christian maturity and right motivation, and this can be easily undermined by "recruiting vocations".

Consecrated secularity

As I said earlier, the temporal finds its real meaning in its relation to man, who in turn is called to God's Kingdom. The S. Is are called to be effectively present in the temporal, and at the same time to carry the world to its real fulfilment. Their consecration adds another significant dimension to their service of the world. By their commitment specially to lifelong celibacy they not only dedicate all their resources towards the actualization of the Kingdom here and now, but also announce its eschatological realization. They are both heralds and servants of the Kingdom. The three evangelical counsels which they freely accept need to be lived within their secular context. This is important precisely because the secular context is so often seen as a threat to Christian perfection. The S. Is have to serve the Church also by correcting some of the prevalent wrong notions about sanctity.

The Christian is called to freedom and he should resist every effort made to submit him to a yoke of slavery (Gal 6:1). Hence in Christian living there should be as few laws as possible, and these too should be totally in the service of love (Gal 5:14), as that is their only justification. The Christian

is called to obey the demands of the Kingdom, and not "the elemental spirits of the universe" (Gal 4:3). This is particularly important to understand the promise of obedience in S. Is. These should have as few laws as possible and the superior should mostly function as a person who can foster discernment. He may "demand obedience" from a member only if he is convinced before the Lord that what he is requiring of the individual is essential for him to live the consecration he has made, or if the services of that individual are indispensable to the institute as an institute. Barring these rare situations, the individual should decide for himself what kind of secular profession to follow, where to work etc. In this he is guided not by his whims and fancies, but by a process of mature Christian discernment. Secular obedience demands not only that he fulfil his secular profession as best as he can, but also that he try to find ways and means to improve the quality of his service. In this he should, of course, keep in mind his own age, talents and also the actuality of his milieu.

The promise of poverty means that while being in the world the S. Is do not become of the world (John 17:16). Unchristian concerns like competition, status-symbols, prestige, glamour etc., are assiduously avoided. In a world where consumerism is a major threat to mankind, even more deadly than atomic weapons, the S. Is will witness to deep joy in a life of evangelical simplicity, that too when they are as much beset with all the uncertainties of life that their neighbours also have. They will, as Gandhi taught, put forward a new approach to civilization, which "in the real sense of the term, consists not in the multiplication, but in the deliberate and voluntary reduction of wants"²¹. They will live on their own earnings. On the other hand, the promise of poverty has a positive content: the S. Is will use as much as possible the latest gifts of science to improve the quality of their professional service, as well as to bring greater happiness to man. Once again, in this they will keep in mind the actualities of their milieu.

The promise of life-long celibacy too needs to be lived within the framework of secular involvement, without the "protecting walls" of traditional religious life. Celibacy is not just no marriage. It means joyful commitment to the Kingdom for which the celibate has a preferential love, just as the

married person has a preferential love for his spouse and finds joy in it (Mt 19:12). It is a call to give our best to God in the service of our brethren: our time, our talents, our energy, our love. It also means allowing the Kingdom to guide us in our relation with other human persons and with the things of this world. Thus joy, hard work, and discernment are essential aspects of celibacy. Today we are faced with a most painful paradox. On the one hand, with the tremendous achievement of mass media, the world is becoming a small village. On the other hand, never has man experienced so much loneliness as today. The celibate in the heart of the world, precisely because he is free of the emotional bonds to spouse and children, is available to the larger family of humankind. It is part of secular celibacy to enter into healthy friendships, to be warm and out-going without giving the impression of being-in-the-marriage-market. The time that is available to the members of the S. Is after their professional involvements should be partly utilized to foster and deepen such friendships not merely with those whom they pick and choose, but specially with those whom they meet in their locality and in their professional situation. They must be very careful not to overwork to save money for God's Kingdom, and thereby have no time for people. One of the greatest services the S. Is can render within the temporal involvement is precisely this possibility of warm friendships.

Today there is a powerful cult of sex as seen in our films, fashions, advertisements etc. This cult of sex is part of the overall trend in modern life: as much pleasure as possible. The S. Is have to exercise a prophetic judgement on this. They will, for example, not distance themselves by their dress from their contemporaries, but they must also be aware that some fashions are meant precisely to awaken the sexual instincts of man. Without enough critical awareness, they will fall victims to these trends. Secular involvement calls for a great deal of critical reflection, for this is what it means to be leaven in the dough. Secular celibacy also implies the inner strength to live alone, work alone, pray alone. To be prophetic in the heart of the world means to stand alone, against the current!

Communion beyond community

If the S. Is are to be Christian presence in the heart of

the world, why should there be any institutes at all? Why can't individuals who while being in the world want to serve Jesus in a radical way do so without forming an institute? Would not secularity be better realized if these individuals continued to be with their families, as other un-married people do, but supported by the larger Christian community as were the very first hermits? This does raise a real difficulty. Man needs the community in some form or the other in his pilgrimage. When he knows that he is not alone in his journey, then he feels supported. So too individuals, who want to dedicate themselves in a radical way while being deeply involved in the temporal, feel strengthened when people with similar ideals come together. This is the meaning of forming S. Is. On the other hand, this coming together must not be at the cost of their secularity.

Community life is an essential element in religious life. There are different types of religious life, and so different types of religious communities. The belonging to a particular community is concretely expressed in different ways: living together under a common roof, meeting regularly for liturgical worship, following a common rule, using a uniform dress etc. The S. Is are called to be leaven in the world. The more the leaven is dissolved and distributed in the dough the more effective it becomes. Hence spatial togetherness will minimize the leavening function of the S. Is. Therefore they will not have a common house with a large number of members living together. They will try to live either alone, or in very small groups that form real families (not communities). The best would be that they continue to be with their own families, provided that this does not minimize their freedom. They will definitely not have any habit or uniform dress, not even an outer sign indicating their being members of an institute. They will try to form a community with the people whom they meet in their professional milieu or in the locality where they live.

The fact that individuals have joined an institute means that they expect to be supported by and want to support others who share their ideals. Within their secular commitment this is best realized through bonds of deep friendship among the members. This will give them the sense of belonging to each other even when they are separated by great distances, pro-

fessional differences and life-style disparities. This friendship will be nurtured not so much by common news letters, but through personal correspondence. They will also occasionally come together for study, reflection, prayer and holiday. Even when they are miles apart they will experience their togetherness when through their prayer of intercession they meet each other in the heart of our God.

Contemplatives in action

Life in the S. Is, if it is to be properly lived, calls for a great deal of Christian maturity and capacity to discern God's will. The S. Is try to combine the radicality of the evangelical counsels without the security structures offered by the traditional forms of religious life. They want to be deeply involved in the transformation of the world from within, not only withstanding its powerful worldly forces, but also combating them. They want to be lost in the dough without losing themselves. This is possible only if they have an inner depth, a centre of gravity within themselves. This is possible only if they are deeply contemplative. They need contemplation if they are to fulfil their prophetic presence in the world, a world which will do its best to crush them²². This contemplation is needed also to constantly purify one's motivation, and to face the loneliness and other tensions that are so often the lot of modern man.

By insisting on contemplation I am not at all suggesting that the S. Is adopt a discipline of prayer which will order them to spend a certain amount of time every day on prayer, or which will require them to say certain prayers. I am convinced that the spiritual life of the S. Is should be nurtured primarily by intense personal prayer. By this I do not suggest that they have no common prayer. This common prayer will be decided largely by the community to which they actually belong as professionals or as inhabitants of a particular locality. They will be like Jesus, who "went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day" (Lk 4:16). But the deeper prayer of Jesus was the long time he spent all alone, and that too at odd hours (Mk 1:35; Lk 5:16, 6:12. etc).

The prayer-life of the individual members of the S. Is will be determined not by some rule, but by the actual situa-

tion of the individual concerned and by his basic desire to be a contemplative like Jesus. Hence a rule that requires daily attendance at the Eucharist or the recitation of some prayers will violate the secular character of the prayer-life of the S. Is. This may sound a bit too strong, but in a certain sense this is not new. At a time when the recitation of the Divine Office in common was part of religious life, St. Ignatius of Loyola did not demand this of the Jesuits, because that would "require fixed residence and the obligation to be in certain places at certain times, and that would hinder the mobility and freedom Ignatius wishes for the apostolic endeavours he envisaged as the vocation of his men"²³. Ignatius did not want to "legislate *anything* that would interfere with or restrict in any way the Jesuit apostolic obligation to serve where necessary. All else was subordinate to this: prayer, dress, penance and liturgy"²⁴. This mentality should all the more be the guiding principle of S. Is. Similarly, the content of their prayer, specially of their intercession, should be determined also by their day to day experience in the heart of the world.

Formation for consecrated secularity

I have said more than once that life in the S. Is calls for a very great degree of Christian maturity. It is rather difficult to find people with such maturity in large numbers, and definitely much more difficult to find them at an early age. Hence the present writer is of the opinion that recruiting vocations as is done now in some "fertile" parts of our country is not at all suited for the type of challenge the S. Is pose. I am inclined to think that the person deciding to join an institute should not only have some professional qualification, but also a job. Here some may raise their eyebrows. They may think that I am becoming foolishly unrealistic. Will we get more companions for our institute if we follow your line of thinking? I am sure this is your question. Well! If as I explained earlier, there is no responsibility to supply personnel to an institution, then the question of numbers is not really important. Second, if the S. Is witness to the evangelical radicality which they profess they will attract suitable candidates. Third, we should trust in God's providence, and not be more anxious about our institute than He is!

I also believe that once a person has expressed his wish to join an institute, his formation should be within a secular framework. To uproot such a person and to place him within the safe confines of a formation house, even when it is not called a novitiate, is counter-productive as far as life in the S. Is is concerned. If the person is to live in the heart of the world, unprotected by any structures, then he should face this all through his formation. I have met members of S. Is who have gone through a regular formation programme in a formation house. They tend to be nunnish! During their formation the candidates should maintain themselves. Today we have so many young people who are doing university studies while holding a regular job.

While the new member continues to be where he was before joining, he is given periodic guidance either through letters, or by personal contact. There could be a person who is deputed for this work, and who goes around meeting the candidates, or a fullfledged member who is nearest to the new-comer takes care of him. These periodic contacts will be complemented by a coming together of all the candidates for a week or two once or twice a year... This will also be a chance for them to meet the fullfledged members and be enriched by their experience. During their formation, the candidates should be guided to deepen their personal prayer, learn the art of discerning the spirits, and develop the habit of looking at the world with critical eyes. By critical I do not mean destructive criticism. In short, the formation should prepare the candidate to live his Christian freedom fully, which finds its fulfilment in love (Gal 5:13).

To sum up then, the secularity of the S. Is is not one of their many concerns. It is the framework of all their concerns, it is their very *raison d'être*. Were they to lose this, they would cease to be of any specific service to the Church. This secularity pervades their work, prayer, life-style and formation. Hence one cannot overstate it. Let me end by quoting once again Cardinal Antoniutti:

I have expatiated on secularity, the specific quality of Secular Institutes. Some of you may be thinking that I have put consecration, i.e., profession of the evangelical counsels in the second place.

True, I have — though after re-affirming more than once the intrinsic power of consecration — emphasized secularity. That was because the value of this characteristic feature of Secular Institutes must be made quite clear — especially in some quarters which shall be nameless — in order to avoid confusion and the sterile polemics to which confusion gives rise²⁵.

Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth

Subhash Anand

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Footnotes

- 1 One founder, a bishop, explicitly says in his constitutions that he wanted his institute members to be "nuns in saris".
- 2 Cardinal Ildebrando Antoniutti to the International Congress of the S. Is. 1970 English text in *Secular Institutes: The Official Documents* -- SIOD -- (Rome, CMIS, 1981), p. 117.
- 3 SIOD, p. 25. 4 SIOD, p. 30. 5 SIOD, p. 27.
- 6 *Perfectae Caritatis*, 11.
- 7 *Apostolicam Actuositatem*.
- 8 *Ad Gentes*, 40-41.
- 9 *Perfectae Caritatis*, 11. English trans. in *The Documents of Vatican II* -- DVI I. -- (Bombay, St. Paul Pbs., 1966), p. 394.
- 10 SIOD, p. 86.
- 11 *L'Osservatore Romano*, 11 May 1987, p. 19, col. 3.
- 12 *Christifideles Laici*, 56. Eng. tr. in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 February 1989, p. 19, col. 1.
- 13 *Lumen Gentium*, 31. DVII, p. 61-62.
- 14 *Ibid* 15 *Ibid.*, 36, DVII, p. 67.
- 16 *Gaudium et Spes*, 1. DVII, 172.
- 17 *Dialogue (Dialogo|Dialog)*, VII-41 (November-December 1979) p. 151.
- 18 *Ibid.*, IV-20 (March 1976), p. 26; IV-24 (November 1976), p. 26
- 19 SIOD, p. 127.
- 20 *Dialogue*, IX-50 (July-September 1981), p. 96.
- 21 V. B. Kher (ed.), *In Search of the Supreme*, 3 vols (Ahmedabad, Navjivan Pb., 1981), vol. II, p. 106.
- 22 My "Contemplation in the Heart of the World", in J. Almeida (ed.) *Growing Towards Consecrated Secularity* (Third Asian Meeting of Secular Institutes and Lay Societies, 1982), pp. 116-25. Reprinted as "Contemplation and Secular Involvement", *Vidyajyoti*, XLVII 5 (June 1983), pp. 240-49.
- 23 R. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (Collegeville, The Liturgical Press, 1986), p. 301.
- 24 *Ibid.* p. 302. 25 SIOD, 130-31,

Secular Institutes and Contemplation

Every consecrated person must be a contemplative. Some will achieve contemplation principally by a life of private and liturgical prayer (monastic religious); others mainly by a life devoted to active service of brethren (active religious); still others chiefly by living a life of witness in the world (members of Secular Institutes).

Members of S. Is will generally find it difficult to spend long hours daily in quiet contemplation. Hence they will have to fall back heavily on the so-called "noisy contemplation" or "masked contemplation". Writes Thomas Merton: "There are many Christians who serve God with a great purity of soul and perfect self-sacrifice in the active life. Their vocation does not allow them to find the solitude and silence and leisure in which to empty their minds entirely of created things and to lose themselves in God alone. They are too busy serving God in his children on earth. At the same time, their minds and temperaments do not fit them for a purely contemplative life: they would know no peace without exterior activity. Although they are active labourers, they are also hidden contemplatives because of the great purity of heart maintained in them by obedience, fraternal charity, self-sacrifice, and a high degree of abandonment to God's will in all they do and suffer... They enjoy a kind of 'masked contemplation'"¹.

Masked or noisy contemplatives remain unrecognized by others. They are people who spend their whole lives for the love of neighbour. In the words of Karl Rahner, the masked contemplative is the one who with difficulty and without any clear evidence of success plods away at the task of awakening in just a few men and women a small spark of faith, of hope and of charity. Selfless love occurs in daily life where people die devoutly, patiently, and hopeful of an absolute meaning,

despite all the absurdities of existence; where people do the simplest task of their daily life without an egoistical turning in on themselves — this is what masked contemplation means².

Put in another way, we can state that masked or noisy contemplatives are those who are able, among other things, to pray the various events of the day. The good and beautiful things of this world promise and point to eternal light and everlasting life. In the Gospels we find Jesus at wedding feasts, at banquets. Jesus marvelled at the birds of the air, the flowers of the field and rejoiced in the many joys of everyday life. The psalmist lifted up his mind and heart to God using ordinary experiences. St. Thomas Aquinas urged all to find God in everything. The reality of the Incarnation assures us that God is at home in human experiences and that we are called to pray our experiences.

The story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is a fine example of what praying our experiences might be, namely, exploring with the risen Lord, as simply as did the disciples on the road, the significance of the events of our life.

Contemplation and mass media

Love and worship of God being man's main task, his daily life ought to be animated by these same values even in reference to mass communication media. Undoubtedly, the newspaper, properly used, can contribute to our prayer life.

While perusing newspapers we should make it a point to select interesting items as sources of prayer and meditation. They could be stories, advertisements, cartoons, photographs etc. A war photograph could point to the truth that God permits evil in the world. A wedding picture could urge us to pray for the couples concerned. Even scandalous items of news can be reminders as to the fact that going through life is perilous and that we need the supportive hands of God. Besides, if such things could happen to others they could happen to us also. In fact, the whole truth about ourselves would hardly edify others.

Contemplation and reading novels

Novel reading can be an occasion of hearing the word that God wishes to speak to us at a particular moment. The

same benefit may be gained from reading novels as from the reading of spiritual books. Novels can help us shift our viewpoints and see things in a new perspective. To be sure, we need reading that will help us better grasp Scripture and tradition. At the same time, we need also reading that will enable us to be more aware of ourselves and of the world around us. When properly approached, novels can help us to know ourselves and our world better.

It is well to appreciate the role of metaphorical language in literature. In the words of Kenneth Russell³, though we tend to consider objective, scientific knowledge as the only certitude, we actually live our lives on the basis of a less neatly defined experiential truth. Our knowledge of another person, for example, is not the product of cold, uninvolved observation. We know him with our hearts as well as our heads, with our emotions and our memories. That is why it is so difficult to express in words what we know of him. The methodology of categorizing a person as honest, attractive, short, dark, and so on is hardly satisfactory. What we wish to convey to others is the impact this person has on us, what he means to us; we want to duplicate our experience of him in others. We reminisce; we tell stories; we try to re-create not only ideas but emotions, so that those listening to us can let our impression echo within them and, in this way, know the other in the same totally involving manner as we do.

In a similar way, novelists take hold of something of the richness of life, but they do not want to hand that to us in a syllogism or a formula because too much would thus be lost. They want to deliver it whole and entire, in all its incarnational reality. So they tell stories.

When we suggest that we include novels in our reading to nourish our spiritual life in Christ, we are not advocating that we sieve them to see what usable titbits they yield; nor are we suggesting that we make a collection of pithy quotations for use in meditation. We are proposing that we read novels with a receptive frame of mind so as to be enriched by the imaginative way of knowing that has shaped them.

This second stage of reflection is dependent on a first reading in which our 'I' withdraws, as it were, to let the novel

affect us as it will. After we have let the novel touch our minds and hearts without opposition or argument, the "I" returns and enters into dialogue with the work. We consciously bring ourselves into the picture: we ponder the implications which the attitudes and values expressed in the story have for us personally. The first reading is relatively objective: we let the work "perform" and, on the basis of its success, we measure its worth.

The second level of reflection is subjective and the result is a new creation which shows the interaction of the story with our thoughts and emotions. This step is beyond the stage of assessing the literary worth of what we have read. We are no longer thinking that this book is good or bad for this or that reason, but we are putting ourselves into the picture and using the incidents and tone of the book to conduct our own enquiry into life and its meaning.

These different stages are easy to grasp if we transfer the way we read the Scripture to our reading of novels, to any reading for that matter. In order to maintain the vigour of our commitment to God, we study the Scripture, that is, we try to understand and appreciate what the text means. When we study the parables of Jesus, it is important for us to grasp what he is saying and why. But it is not enough to study the parables. We must also integrate them into our life in such a way that we feel the impact of their message for us at the moment.

When we read a novel our minds and our emotions are touched. It takes us beyond abstraction deep into the complexity of life. It puts flesh back on ideas that have become sterile and thin through familiarity. It makes us experience truth in all its human dimensions and in all its human implications. It opens our eyes.

A novel is the closest thing to a transmigration of the soul we are likely to experience because we are always the main character of a good novel. Our insertion into the fictional character allows us to retain a sense of our separate identity but, in fact, as we read on, the main character's feelings and sentiments become ours. We enter into his life in a way that can never be duplicated in "real" life where we are

locked out of the inner being even of those who are closest to us. In a novel we imaginatively walk in another's shoes and experience life from another's point of view. We are, as it were, given trial runs in another's existence.

To be successful, a novelist must be deeply submerged in life and possess the skill to communicate his experience effectively through the dynamic of imagination. The greatest writers have been able to see through the immediate world to a larger mystery beyond. They have been sensitive, we might say, to the revelation which God has written into the very order of nature. Because God is the source of all things, nature and history unendingly speak of him. It is this "word" spoken in the midst of life to which the novelist is attuned. Since this "secular" word is not entirely profane, there is no need to "christianize" authors or to restrict our reading exclusively to those who show an explicit interest in religion. The old division between the sacred and the secular is no longer valid. In any case, our attentiveness to literature's rich, sensitive way of knowing should make us realize that the secular as well as the religious draw us to the ultimate Reality.

Contemplation and writing

Writing can be a way of praying. To start with, favourite passages from the Scripture or other sources could be copied. Then we could jot down our insights that emerge from our reflection on our daily experiences. Such a journal would constitute, as it were, our biographical sketch of Christ. We can, in the meanwhile, envision the Evangelists' experience which led them to compose the Gospels. There is no doubt as to the fact that their experience in writing the Gospels was an entering into the mind and heart of Christ and consequently a prayer experience. None of the Evangelists was a professional "writer". Be that as it may, their writing represented a deep communication with God, with others and with themselves.

Writing helps us see into the depths of things. It is more than a recording of already finished thoughts. It is something that is creative and productive in itself. Writing helps us to break the automatic pattern of our life and gives access to our unconscious. We are thereby awakened to the newness of every day. Things are seen differently as if through a new camera.

Every moment turns out to be unique. An exciting factor is perceived in the first conscious thought of the day. While writing we discover an extraordinary relationship between the hand that writes and the mind and heart that thinks and feels. New vistas unfold, new sensitivities develop and new capacities reveal themselves gently and quietly.

We are wont to live outside of ourselves, being unaware of the inner centre of our being. As we write, we experience the thrill of our own personal thoughts and insights that are distinct from the borrowed thoughts of others.

Undoubtedly, writing can be an effective way to prayer. Written words are personal words that emerge from our silence creating an added sense of privacy and solitude. They generate a dialogue between ourselves and our deeper selves revealed in the process of writing. Predictably, we begin to hear the wordless dialogue between our deepest selves and God in the process. Writing, insofar as it involves time set apart for moving from outer to inner levels of life, for exploring new depths into the nature of realities and gaining new insights, cannot but be prayer and contemplation in the implicit sense.

More explicitly, writing can be the articulation of the praises of God that well up in our hearts as we look at the world in a spirit of faith. This would amount to composing our own psalms.

Contemplation and art

In an extremely interesting presentation, Charles Murphy discusses the mind of John Paul II on faith and art⁴, which is supremely pertinent to the issue at hand. John Paul II used the occasion of the liturgy in honour of Blessed Angelico, whom he declared patron of artists and painters, to underscore the organic and constitutive bonds between Christianity and culture⁵. In the case of Bl. Angelico, the Pope declared, faith became culture and culture became faith made visible, and in his life and work, art became prayer. Thus, the Pope stated, art reveals itself as a road which can lead to Christian perfection⁶. Human artistic creativity, he went on, is a reflection of the divine creativity.

This theme received a deeper theological elaboration in the homily the Pope gave at a Mass for artists celebrated in

Belgium on May 20, 1985, in which he declared that a world without art can only with difficulty open itself to Christian faith and love⁷. It was on this occasion that he gave the most extended development of his theology of art — art which, he says, like Christian faith, hope and love, introduces us to a new world. Using as his basic text the passage from Acts that "God is not far from each of us, for it is in Him that we have our life, activity and being" (17:27), he sought to show that the sole fact of the artistic search to express the deepest levels of human life and the heart of reality, even without explicit religious reference, is in itself a drawing near to God, however unknowingly. The work of art is itself an experience analogous to the religious experience of faith.

Faith, among other things, is a way of seeing history and beneath history, calling our attention to deeper realities and the interiority of things. Our eyes become capable of seeing the beauty and coherence of everything that lives in this world⁸. In an analogous way art interprets reality beneath what the senses perceive. It is born of the silence that comes from being astonished and from the affirmation of a sincere heart. It derives its strength from its nearness to the mystery of reality.

An artist has the intuition that nature is already a reflection of the divine beauty, and the human face is the most beautiful icon of the living God. Similarly the Christian has learned from Jesus to recognize behind the face of the other, especially of the poor, the profound mystery of the Son of Man himself.

Art is the analogue, the highest natural resemblance, to God's own creative activity and even to the divine generation of the Word, for art wants to beget a work made in our image. The artistic inspiration, though remaining within the natural order, transcends the deliberations of reason and proceeds from God present in us.

The artistic imagination is the human organ of transcendence which by its symbols and techniques of intensification and paradox are sometimes better able than discursive thought to capture and communicate our tacit knowledge of religious mysteries. William James had also seen the similarity

of the religious and the aesthetic experiences, for both perceive nature as the sacrament of a spiritual reality.

Contemplation and athletics

Even though facilities for physical education abound in most countries, rarely is athletics taken to be an exercise worthy of serious spiritual attention. Surprisingly, classic political philosophy saw things differently. For it, athletics had a certain spiritual quality about it that deserved serious reflection. Plato opined that sports might well be the proper analogy to understand our relation to the divinity. Aristotle felt that athletics was very near to pure contemplation.

In games there is something beyond ourselves that is utterly fascinating and worthy of being merely beheld. Through sports we come to realize that there is something worthwhile in itself, something not touched first by utility or pleasure, something that is merely fascinating. This explains why people turn out in thousands to watch games, why spectators at a truly well-played game even cease from eating, drinking and thinking other thoughts simply to watch something unfold. That is why Aristotle said that athletics is the nearest thing to pure contemplation, something for its own sake.

Besides, the experience of watching a true game is one of watching something whose end result is unknown and unknowable in advance. Such is the way of all human life.

Contemplation and travelling

Travelling may not be a spiritual exercise; but it can certainly exercise the spirit. We all delight in travel. There are few who are immune to the wanderlust that is deep within us. We are highly mobile and seem to be more comfortable in movement than at rest.

While travelling, new roads, new skies open to expand our minds and hearts. The world is the sacrament of God, the earth is the face of God. The rivers, the plains, the mountains, the seas, were all made for us and hence create new songs, new prayers, new psalms in us in their awe, wonder and beauty. "And God saw it was good"—the prayer of Genesis becomes ours in a more deeply rooted way. All of this was made for us; all if it is waiting to be seen and appreciated by us. They are waiting to be delighted in as only we can delight in them.

God speaks to us on the way. "Now he is going before you to Galilee; it is there that you will see him." Jesus goes before us; he goes with us in all our journeys.

Contemplation and walking

God walked and conversed with Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden in the cool of the evenings. Jesus walked with his disciples. Every walk of ours should be an Emmaus walk with Jesus by our side, even though there may be "something preventing us from recognizing him".

Walking is a kind of seeing, a kind of being present. There is a way of knowing a place because we have put it under our feet. It is in walking that we discover the voices and silences of the city and the woods, the river and the lake. There is a school of philosophy, the peripathetic followers of Aristotle, who developed their philosophy by walking up and down, back and forth. There is a school of meditation in Zen Buddhism which does its meditation through walking.

Walking brings with it a special kind of calmness, openness and freedom. We must walk in the newness of life, in faith and in the Spirit (Gen 3:8; 17:1; Mt 4:20; 10:39; Jn 12:35; Eph 5:2; 4:1; Lk 24:15).

Contemplation and sitting

Sitting is the posture of rest, receptivity, listening, learning, reading, writing etc. Sitting is the posture of celebration, of friendship, of prayer. It is very relaxing to sit down when the work is done and time is not pressing on us.

It is refreshing physically as well as spiritually to sit on our favourite chair, to sit in the shade of a tree or on a hill experiencing the quiet joy of being alive, healthy, graced, friended and praising God in the meanwhile. It is nothing short of a transcendental experience to sit quiet listening to good music (Gen 2:2; Mt 19:28; Heb 7:25; Mt 5:1; Lk 4:19; Mk 9:35; Mt 26:30).

Contemplation and eating

Eating can and should be a form of contemplation. Living as we do in an environment of fast foods and quick meals, we hardly take sufficient time for eating and consequently fail to focus our attention on the food we eat.

Food is one of God's choicest gifts and as we learn to treat it with respect, it begins to treat our bodies as well as our spirits. The experience of enjoying three full meals when several have to be content with much less, can be a deep contemplative experience of gratitude towards God.

In times of retreat we generally take our meals in silence and in a contemplative mood. It is rewarding to carry this experience into our everyday meals even when we don't keep silence. We can do this by taking sufficient time for eating, enjoying it and thanking God for the food we eat. If we learn this form of contemplative eating, we can readily appreciate the exhortation of St. Paul: "So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor 10:31)

Contemplation and sleeping

God wants us to sleep at night. Sleep is one of God's most beautiful gifts to us. The joy of going to bed at night is great. Sleep is the time to rest in the heart of our God who watches over us and slumbers not. Blessed are we if we can sleep in God's love with a clear conscience.

The last moments of the day before falling asleep and the first moments of awakening from sleep are privileged times of prayer. The first and especially the last moments of sleep are holy moments and precious opportunities for a colloquy with God. It is then that we are closest to the ground of our being.

In the night of sleep, the Lord may call us to a special mission. Samuel heard the Lord's voice in the context of sleep. A word was brought to Job. A messenger of God appeared to Joseph in sleep (Mt 2:13; Gen 3:21; Ps 127:2; Mk 4:38; Lk 9:32; Mk 14:41).

Conclusion

Members of S. Is who are striving to preserve the contemplative life in the world receive the graces they need to meet the circumstances affecting the vocation that God has chosen for them. Consequently, the graces that relate to the use of the active life as a means to contemplative union with God

are given for that purpose and for no other. The right use of the circumstances is more important than the circumstances themselves.

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Footnotes

- 1) Raymond Bailey, *Thomas Merton on Mysticism*, Garden City, 1975, p. 160.
- 2) Karl Rahner, *Madonna*, Jesuit Publication in Melbourne, Australia, April 1987, p. 11.
- 3) Kenneth Russell, "Novels for Meditation and Themes from Soul Bellow", *Spirituality Today*, 31 (1979) pp. 196-207
- 4) Charles Murphy, "The Church and Culture since Vatican II: On the Analogy of Faith and Art", *Theological Studies*, 48 (1987) pp. 317-331
- 5) Homily, Feb. 18, 1984, *Osservatore Romano*, Feb. 20-21, 1984
- 6) *Ibid.*
- 7) *Osservatore Romano*, May 20-21, 1985, 1
- 8) *Ibid.*

Problems of Secular Institutes

Secular Institutes, a new phenomenon of the 20th century is a dilemma in the hearts of many. Though Secular Institutes came to existence in the 18th century, the Ecclesiastical approval was granted only in 1947 by Pope Pius XII through the Encyclical "Provida Mater Ecclesia". As it is the case with the origin of almost everything in the Church, S. Is also have their inception in the West. It was started in France during the French revolution when it became difficult or rather impossible for Priests and Religious to carry out their apostolic work. No doubt, we can say it was a timely intervention of the Holy Spirit who continuously renews the face of the earth. Unlike religious life, this new form took a very simple and yet noble manifestation and was appealing to the young women. This shows there was already in the hearts of the people the desire to be witnesses of Christ like the first Christians whose lives were totally given to the service of Christ and His Church.

Only when this way of life proved its stability through the wear and tear of life for about 2 centuries, did the church show her concern towards it and approve it as a 'state of perfection'.

These Institutes approved as a state of perfection have their manifold problems which are external as well as internal, theoretical as well as practical. I would like to discuss some of them here.

The main problem, as I would think, is the problem of recognition and understanding. The idea of S. Is' vocation is very confusing and often misunderstood. In the hearts of the people the pattern of religious life with its external and internal form, with its ideals and aims, with its consecration and apostolate, is traditionally rooted and well designed. It has its

status, prestige and glamour at the very outset. But that is not the case with the S. Is. The very name itself is ambiguous. It is very clear from the church documents that the consecration of S. Is' members is secular by nature. That means they are consecrated to be in the midst of the world and their primary responsibility is to bear witness to Christ living in the world, in the day to day ordinary circumstances of life. This demands their active and absorbing (hidden) presence among the people, one among the many or as the documents says, "leaven in the mass". But the question arises: How is a secular state of Consecration possible? It is strange and difficult for the people to understand who are saturated with the concept of traditional religious life and its modalities throughout the centuries. Is it a 2nd class form of religious life for the weak and the less privileged? Many people including priests and religious think in this line. To be frank, it is the priests and the Religious who underrate this vocation and even discourage the candidates who feel an attraction towards this way of life. They underesteem it in terms of lack of stability and security or in terms of 2nd class form of dedicated life and even some times do not admit that this is a vocation inspired by the Holy Spirit. In their view, to be like an ordinary lay person in his life style, dressing and appearance has no prestige, position, status or glamour in living for God and doing apostolic work. Sorry to say that even ecclesiastical persons think of secular vocation as auxiliaries to Religious Sisters. And they have found such Institutes suited for purposes which are not proper to S. Is. Perhaps it is ignorance which causes this way of thinking and I even feel sometimes that it is the superiority complex of these people who feel that they are the only chosen ones and the all knowing class. We read in the gospel, "He called to Himself the men He wanted" (Mk. 3:13); "You have not chosen me but I have chosen you" (Jn. 15:16). God has His own way of calling, choosing and possessing, to be His own. His criteria for selection are very clear from the calling of the 12 and even of many others as mentioned in the gospels. The Holy Spirit who renews the face of the earth day by day inspires his chosen ones to participate actively in his renewal programme and we see the expression of it in the world, in the church and in the people who are to be respected and appreciated.

The problem of lack of recognition and under-estimation is an international problem and this should not be a source of discouragement for the Institutes. It is always the history of the church that every new attempt is tested; its viability is tried in the fire through centuries before it is accepted and confirmed. S. Is which are rather new in the church also have to prove its viability and reliability through the centuries, if it is to be appreciated and understood. It is the great responsibility of the members to work towards this aim.

It is always consoling that those who come to know the S. I. often feel attracted to this vocation, appreciate it and even take pains towards a deeper study & understanding.

Another problem the S. Is face is the problem of identity. S. Is are not religious. They are lay people with secular consecration. They live in the world and do not have a uniform. They enjoy the good things of the world. They are privileged to live single or in groups. They also do organized apostolic work. They take the 3 vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. They have their Constitutions and Rules. They enjoy the privileges of the Church. Then what is the difference between the Secular Institute and the Religious? The religious also are living in the world, more active and involved in the world even more than S. Is. Some are not particular about having a uniform. If so then what is the identity of S. I.? How does it differ from religious life? Is there a need for a special category of people as S. I., especially now since the religious are very much in the world? How can S. I. members claim to be consecrated people having the 3 vows, especially the vow of poverty while enjoying the good things of the world? It is not very easy to give a convincing answer to all these questions. Some times the answer may seem as lame excuses to justify the privileges. However it sounds like, I may make an attempt to answer these questions.

A person is not to be equated with what he *does*, but with what he *is*. It is the "being", not the "doing" which makes him a person. For example a servant can never become a mother of a child by doing everything as the mother does. Even if the mother does not do anything for the child, still she is the mother and nobody can deny it. It is not what one does which is important but what one is. S. Is are not religious and their

consecration is secular because the church has approved it as such. It is the canonical status of the S. Is that they are consecrated laity (p. c. 11) and should live in the midst of the world. The attainment of their holiness is by using the means of the world. The world needs its own people to proclaim that it is good, sacred, holy, loved and redeemed by a loving father — God, made holy by the loving touch of the incarnate Word — Jesus and daily renewed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. This proclamation should sound from within, in all spheres of life, than from outside. When the proclaimators feel the worth within them they can bear true witness to the reality of the world which is in St. John's gospel: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (Jn. 3:16-17). Being lay people they are called to live in the heart of the world like any other lay person engaged in the temporal realities in the ordinary circumstances of the world. What is demanded of them is not the change of place, dress or work but change of heart and attitudes. There should not have any external difference which marks them separate, other than the distinct personality and responsible christian life. It is for this, in short, they are of the S. I. and have secular consecration.

In this context we should understand the vow of poverty of S. Is. "All that is created is good, nothing is to be rejected, but everything is to be received with a prayer of thanks." (1 Tim. 4: 4) The circumstances and the tradition have given the impression that to become holy one has to go away from the world which is evil and sinful, has to give up or even hate all the good things of the world, abandon the home and dear ones etc. But we all know that it is not God's plan that His children should always be strictly ascetical and can never enjoy the good things of the world. Jesus says: "I have come in order that you might have life — life in all its fullness" (Jn. 10:10) "so that they might have my joy in their hearts in all its fullness" (Jn. 17:13). Christianity is a life of joy in the Holy Spirit. God might some times call people to live a radical life for some special purposes. But the majority of His children are called to live in the midst of the world and to use the means of the world to find and experience their loving and living God. Here comes the practice of the vow of poverty of S. Is. They witness to the reality that all

that is created by God is good and can become the means of holiness if used properly. This does not mean that they are to accumulate material things and to be its slaves. No, they are called to be its masters and use them according to their need and glorify God through them. They must also resist the temptation and inordinate attachment to material possession. They must witness to the freedom of the children of God by being detached.

The 3 vows or living together does not make one a religious. It is the religious consecration which makes a person religious. S. Is also have their consecration by means of the 3 vows. But the practice of these vows is in the world by using the means of the world.

Having originated in the West, the Secular Institute has its foundation in almost all the continents now. The mode of life and culture varies in different places and countries. Hence it cannot have a strict pattern of life everywhere. The church is very generous in allowing plurality in S. Is according to the culture of the place where we live. Hence there is the choice to live single or in groups and if necessary to do organized apostolate, keeping the secular character of the Institute.

Another problem we experience is the insecurity feeling of the parents. Since Secular Institute members look like any other ordinary woman, parents are anxious about their perseverance. The parents, in many instances, would have a more 'glamorous' career for their children. And some parents even oppose their daughters' vocations on the ground that there is little in the S. I. to compare with the prestige of religious life. Secular Institutes do not have a distinctive dress. They dress like people in their line of work and steer a middle course between extreme fashion and drab mediocrity. There is no clothing ceremony as in the religious life and the profession of vows is a quiet ceremony. Surprisingly enough, the lack of all these things have made some parents unreasonably opposed to their children's vocation to an S. I. This affects vocation to S. Is. I believe that the life of the "singles" developing through charismatic groups is an answer to this problem. Moreover responsible, dedicated life

of the members is the apt answer to this problem to a great extent.

There are also problems from within — of vocation, formation, on-going formation etc. As mentioned above vocation to secular institutes is not very attractive. There is nothing glamorous about it. Besides there is a lot of discouragement from the part of priests and the religious who do not understand this vocation. The quality of vocation is also very important. Since this is a special vocation this requires more maturity. It is always preferable to have candidates who have some life experience and a job, who feel a christian responsibility towards their own life and towards the world, and an urge to be a lay apostle. They should be quite mature to stand the stress and strain of life in the midst of the world. The world gives so much of attraction and temptations and unless one is strong enough and has a strong sense of dedication there is always the danger of losing one's vocation. There are no externals to protect them. Their inner strength, values and holiness are the only weapons for them to fight against their enemies. It is not very easy to live in this world, where there is so much of devaluation, demoralization, materialism and consumptionism. But at the same time it is here we have to give witness through our life like a lighted candle in the dark. The initial and on-going formation should be oriented towards these aims. In the routine of life and profession, in the stress and strain of life, always there is the danger of laxity and spiritual aridity and the on-going formation may lag behind. This is all the more so for these members who live individually with nominal attachment to the Institute. There are some Institutes whose members live individually and take full responsibility for their life. The Institute is only to give them guidance and directions. Only through constant reviving of the spirit, prayer and dedication members can withstand the temptation of life.

Another problem regarding formation is that only with much difficulty we can find a priest who understands the secular vocation and will be ready to help us. The Institute must find solution to this problem either by creating interest in the priests who are friendly with them or should train members

who can help in the spiritual & theological problems, and give guidance.

Secular Institutes are still in their experimental period. There is the western patrimony of the S. I. In India, almost all of them have their roots in Europe or Canada. They have legally taken their spiritual and structural heritage to India. The cultural background varies and a lot of adaptation is necessary. In Europe to live a single life is rather a normal situation and there are all the social securities available for one's life. To live in the midst of the world, doing a job, bearing witness through one's consecration, taking full responsibility for one's life and old age, having only minimum support from the Institute one belongs to, is to experience the secularity in its fulness. This manner of life style makes this vocation more clear and understandable. Secularity is the inevitable aspect of S.I. and only through it this vocation finds its meaning and existence.

The socio-cultural situation of women in India is different. Women are always protected and normally do not live alone. The culture demands them to be settled once they are of age either by marriage or by joining a community. This is the responsibility of the parents much more than of the girl. To live single is rather insecure and questionable. Some times people are astonished to see girls living alone and they even presume that there is at least a night watcher (man) to safeguard them. Of course this culture is slowly changing and women are trying to become more free and to be liberated from the social stigmas. It is in this Indian culture that S. Is should take root, grow, flourish and bear fruit. Hence it is not very practical to transplant the western S. I., as it is, here in India. Indian culture has to find its own way to accommodate it in her soil. A good many Institutes in India have adapted group living and some type of organized apostolic work either in the diocese or by their own. Often this is a need since there is so much of unemployment and it is very difficult or rather impossible to find a job even for the qualified person. The politically saturated situation makes it all the more difficult with the evil of bribery and party influences. Only earning members can live alone or at home. But often they become victims

of exploitation by their own people, let aside the insecurity. It is here the S. Is risk their identity. When there is a group or common living then there will be some regularities, common practices, central pooling of earnings and social and professional securities. Then how do members live and experience their secularity? What is the difference between the religious and the S. Is? This is a challenge for the S. I. It has to find the answer in its life and work. The Institutes which follow only a conventional pattern for its living and work cannot be called an S. I. Because there is no secularity or personal presence or witnessing. The S. Is in India have to go a long way to experience and experiment their identity in the Indian soil.

The church in India has in her mission concentrated heavily on education and of late, on medical relief and social welfare, whilst her presence in the political, economic, scientific and cultural life is insignificant. The absence of instructed and dedicated laity in all these fields is striking. Also almost all the fields that are of vital concern for the apostolate of tomorrow, such as mass media, education of women, rural uplift, youth work etc., are yet to be discovered in the Indian church. In India all these sectors of the apostolate have only 1% and often even much less of the existing ecclesiastical personnel at their disposal. The S. Is in India have unfortunately copied this pattern of our missionary past without adjusting it to the given realities of the nation.

These are some of the problems common to all the Institutes. I am happy to say that the meetings of S. Is in the regional, national, Asian and international levels always throw much light on these problems. The important thing is that we are aware of the problems and have the readiness and openness to advice, new developments and proper guidance. Let the Holy Spirit who renews the face of the earth constantly be the main resource person for inspiration & guidance.

The Theology of Secular Institutes

I propose to elaborate the theology of Secular Institutes (S. Is) from the point of view of consecrated secularity. While approving S. Is, Pius XII pointed out that their members are to live in the world and consecrate themselves totally to God and the service of souls at the same time¹. They are not religious² and hence not subject to the canon law of the religious. On the contrary, they are to adopt a normal secular life and exercise their apostolate in the world provided that these do not harm their entire consecration to God³. Hence the two essential dimensions of S. Is are: consecration to God and life in the world (secularity).

These two ideas seem to be contradictory. Referring to consecration to God, we tend to think of the special consecration of priests or religious, which involves an element of "leaving the world" or shunning it. Hence, to speak of a life which is both wholly consecrated to God and at the same time fully lived in the world will necessarily sound like a contradiction or at least a curious and rare exception. Did not our Saviour tell his followers to be in the world but not of it? Does this not mean that any sort of presence in the world except that of mere physical presence is forejudged by him? Bodily presence in the world coupled with a spiritual absence appears to be part of consecrated life.

As far as S. Is are concerned, the Church refuses to see any contradiction between consecration and secularity, and this for good reasons as we shall see.

I. Distinction between consecration and non-consecration

Consecration in general means "setting apart". In the mysterious design of God, he sets apart some persons for his

special service. Through baptism we are made participants in Christ's paschal mystery and in the community of the baptized. Yet we might receive a special call to follow Jesus more closely and more intimately as in the case of St. Paul. This call — and not our answer to it — consecrates us to God. All the same, the unconditional response to this call is of utmost importance. The Gospels give ample evidence of the decisive role of this unreserved self-gift which implies the handing over of oneself to the Lord without regard for personal plans and for the future.

Consecration to God necessarily puts a stamp on the whole life of a person. Hence it is perpetual and inaugurates a state of life, a moral attitude and a social position in the Church. This self dedication is total and is meant as such. When Jesus calls a person to follow him, it is the totality of his existence that he demands. A temporary commitment will not do. There is the unremitting demand of Jesus to lose one's life so as to gain it.

In fact, such a self-giving cannot be realized until death since it must express itself historically in time. It is impossible for Man to give himself in a complete and unique act. Love seeks to liberate itself from the limitations of time and expresses its decision to make a total dedication through one definitive act of vow, promise, oath or any equivalent. This morally binding commitment is meant to express and determine the gift of self to God without reserve.

There is a basic sacredness attached to every reality. In the words of Paul Hinnebusch, sacred and profane are two constant, simultaneous dimensions of every created reality⁴. In some sense, everything created is both profane and sacred. Profane is not merely the negative characteristic of "non-sacredness". As something positive, the profane is created reality in itself, having its own authentic God-given values. All reality, precisely as created by God and for God, has an initial sacredness. Sacredness is not the thing in itself; sacredness is the thing's *relatedness to God*. Thus there is no real opposition between sacred and profane. This initial sacredness of all things may be called *ontic sacredness*. This ontic sacredness is brought to its perfection by Man's recognition and acceptance of it.

In God's creation, all things are directed to Man and through Man and Christ, to God. "All things are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." (1 Cor 3: 22-23) The sacredness of the world is a participation in the sacredness of Man insofar as Man is openness toward the Transcendent. Man precisely as person is openness to the Other. As spirit he is openness to the Infinite. In his essence, he is all desire for the Beatific Vision. Openness to the Infinite is the very definition of created spirit. Man is created as receptivity to God. This ontic openness of Man's being, the sacredness of his very nature as relatedness to God, has to become effective in his personal opening of himself in willing acceptance of God who offers himself in love and self-revelation. Here we have the more profound explanation of Man's ontic sacredness.

Man can have communion with God only in communion with his fellowmen. Thus, the relationship of Man to God is not merely the relationship of an individual person to him, but that of one in relationship with others. And so there is a sacred, dimension to Man's total social and cultural life.

Consecration is the act in which one gives himself totally, firmly and permanently to God, accepting his will and the sacredness of his ontic order of reality. As a result of this act of devoted acceptance of God and his will, one's very person becomes consecrated, firmly established in its personal relationship with God. Thus consecration produces a personal sacredness perfecting ontic sacredness.

Consecration adds a real quality and perfection to the very being of our person. It adds a real quality to our very being because Man is what he makes himself by his free choice. Each human act of choice leaves its effect in the very structure of our existence. For though a human action is transitory in its externals, in its core it is permanent. The core of each action is the decision through which the person realizes himself in some direction. It is the orientation which he gives himself. This orientation is a reality in one's very existence; it determines one's mode of being.

Thus consecration as a freely chosen directedness to God, gives a sacred existence to a person. The orientation of one's existence to God, accomplished by the act of consecration is a

real quality of one's being. We now proceed to investigate the nature of this real quality of being brought about by consecration. A consideration of the mystery of salvation will throw light on the nature of such a quality. For this purpose I heavily depend on the insightful study of James O'Reilly⁵.

Formerly a purely personal view of salvation prevailed. Nowadays it has become also cosmic and societal. If asked several years ago what the statement that Christ is Saviour meant, the answer would have been confined to human beings considered as individuals before God. If pressed further and asked what about human society, the answer would have been that if individuals were saved, the group would automatically be saved.

Of late, the subject of salvation has witnessed considerable expansion. Society is no more regarded as the sum-total of the individuals composing it. Just as the properties of a molecule are more than the sum of the properties of its constituent atoms, as the living organism is more than the cells of which it is composed, so too society is more than the members constituting it. When persons from a group interact among themselves they constitute a body which is other than the individuals of this group, without, however, ceasing to retain their personal identity. This body, this corporate entity too needs to be saved. Thus salvation and sinfulness extend beyond individuals and embrace that more elusive totality, the body of human society.

But that does not go far enough. Besides society, the universe too must enter the salvation picture. For just as society is the body into which we grow, though remaining fully ourselves, so cosmos is the womb *out of* which we were drawn forth and *within* which we survive, of course, with the creative and preservative action of God.

In the context of this change in view of the subject of salvation, the lay state of life as distinct from the clerical state, is immediately put in a very different light. After all, it is the main task of the lay people to devote themselves to the control of our cosmic environment and the organization and management of human society. These are the two great centres of lay technological and political effort. While the former absorbs the

skills of physicists, chemists and biologists, the latter commands the attention of psychologists, sociologists and political scientists. It is here that the laity earn their daily bread. World-building and social engineering can no longer be put down as this worldly occupations tinged with vanity. Though 'distinct', the secular and the sacred are no longer opposed. The struggle for salvation extends far beyond the business of saving one's soul. All the human efforts at furthering cosmic development and societal organization contribute towards salvation, and this not just because those efforts might be virtuous but because they make an intrinsic contribution towards *something* that is being saved for eternity. It is not just individuals alone who are being saved, but society and cosmos as well.

How does this salvation come about? Starting with the salvation of individuals, we note that the human person as embodied spirit, moves along a path of salvation which carries him through the stages of infancy, youth, maturity, old age, dissolution, death and resurrection. The way of personal salvation is both wonderful and flattering, on the one side, and terrible and humiliating, on the other. It is wonderful and flattering because it is thanks to one's efforts that growth in body and spirit materializes. It is at the same time terrible and humiliating because one's very progress forward carries him into eclipse, darkness, and separation. The last act of a Man is to lay himself down in death before God who saves. The human person does not arrive at his fulfilment of body and spirit by a uniformly victorious process of transformation. Transformation leads to a point of rupture at which all effort seemingly comes to nothing. In fact, the effort of life has disposed the person to receive the fulness of life from God. Here we have a peculiar blending of triumph and failure, victory and defeat, life and death. It is the mystery of life through death. Christians have long been accustomed to see this mystery as typified in the life of Christ and celebrated in the liturgy of the Eucharist. Entering into the spirit of this mystery has long been a major part of a Christian's personal and spiritual endeavour.

The same is true of the salvation of cosmos and society. They too have to pass through darkness and death. They too are destined to have their days of infancy, youth, maturity, age,

feebleness, dissolution, death and resurrection. Cosmic and societal salvation comes by transformation through rupture. Cosmic and societal salvation is also typified in the paschal mystery of the Lord of the cosmos and the head of the Body.

If we must endure the humiliating fact of personal death, we must also endure the humbling fact of the death of the cosmos and of the society that we have made and engineered. All technique and process of cosmic and societal construction is of such an inherent nature that it cannot but generate devolution in the very act of promoting evolution.

We are not referring here to the destructive effects that always follow from the abusive exercise of technique. What is in question here is a diminution that is inherent in technique at its best. We should at least pause before carelessly asserting that Man is constantly creating and making the world, not just to pass time until the parousia, but in order to make the parousia come to pass. That is true, but we bring the parousia to pass with rupture.

Human secular activity, therefore, is ambivalent. We will focus attention on three areas of human secular activity so as to bring into view the element of ambiguity inherent in their very goodness. For convenience's sake, we shall designate these areas as "business", "marriage", and "government", using these terms in a broad sense. These are the centres of ongoing action in the secular life of Man. The badge of the first is property, of the second is spouse, of the third is personal autonomy. The absence of these is a distinguishing mark, though only a negative one, of life in the redeemed world of the future. Furthermore, these are the goods which in some sense are relinquished by the practice of the evangelical counsels in consecrated life and which distinguish consecrated persons from non-consecrated ones. Any attempt to penetrate the meaning of consecrated life must start with an examination of these areas of life.

Taking first the area of business, we note that it is business in the broad sense that puts the world ahead and makes it fit for Man to live in. The badge of business is ownership and taking care. About the goodness and dignity of both there is no question. But where is business leading us?

In the kingdom to come one need own nothing because all possess everything. Life in the kingdom will be marked by freedom from care. In a real sense the poor are nearer the kingdom insofar as their propertyless state more truly resembles the perfected state to come than does the condition of those who own and take care. Not that the unjust and enforced character of their poverty is good but that the resemblance to the kingdom is clearer. The first anomaly in the life of business is that it will end in its opposite. The completion of our world is God's gift; no less than its initiation.

Turning now to marriage, we observe a like ambiguity. Marriage as we know it now is a necessary part of Man's seeking after enlargement and fulness of life. Far deeper than the achievements of technology are the mysterious accomplishments of hearth and home. But, as with business, we must ask as to where marriage is taking us.

In the redeemed world "they will no longer marry or give in marriage". The family of Man will have come to its completion. Life and love together will be held in perfect measure without pairing. In a real sense the unmarried are closer to the kingdom because their unpartnered state more closely resembles the perfected state of the new family of Man. Not that enforced loneliness or unjust desertion is good but that the resemblance to the kingdom is clearer. Marriage will terminate in its opposite.

We come finally to the third area of human secular activity — government of human society. Here we include every exercise of personal freedom in organized community. We seek a more just balance between the claims of person and community. Our avowed aim is to set Men free to work together happily at the task of building the earth and finding life and love together in marriage or celibacy. About the goodness of this effort not the slightest doubt may be raised. Nevertheless, we must ask as to where government is taking us.

Though it may sound strange in our ears, it is true to say that the kingdom towards which our present efforts direct us is not a kingdom of freedom, but one of captivation by Love Supreme. All free pursuit of good is conducted with a view to being caught by it in a delirium of joy. In a sense the unfree,

like the unpropertied and the unmarried are closer to the kingdom, because their freedomless state more closely resembles the perfected state of life to come than does the condition of those who are able to choose. Not that involuntary servitude is good, but that the resemblance to the kingdom is stronger. The goal of human government will end in its opposite.

There is no implication that freedom in government is bad, nor that freedom in government should not be sought in unceasing measure and furthered by every technique. It is simply that freedom does not produce the kingdom. Freedom can only carry us to this side of a point of rupture where we are still free so that by the gift of God we will be found on the other side of the point of rupture, captive but liberated.

Such, then, is the inescapable ambivalence of all profane human activity. Man grows and matures by a progressive understanding of both sides of the full truth of his creaturehood. He must have concern and assume responsibility for the world seen as continuing creation. But he does not come of age unless he also opens his eyes to the truth that the world as entering transformation passes through crucifixion and death. His full manhood is found through that unique reality that is crucifixion and death. Whoever separates these goods does violence to the meaning of Christian love for the world.

Having seen the way in which salvation — cosmic, personal and societal — gives a strange two-sidedness to Man's movement through business enterprise, conjugal life, and societal organization, towards the kingdom to come, we are now in a position to come to grips with the meaning of consecrated life in today's world. What is the meaning that is expressed by the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience? This will explain the distinction between consecrated life and non-consecrated life.

This distinction arises naturally out of the ambivalent character of Man's life in the world. Inasmuch as there is need for Christian community to proclaim opposite but complementary truths about the process of world salvation it was to be expected that a distinction of states would emerge in the public order of Christendom. Truths of great consequences demand public articulation. On the one hand, work upon the

world, love in marriage, and the search for personal autonomy in community are good. They lead us in the direction of the Kingdom. On the other hand, these activities are unable to place us in the Kingdom, and they will themselves be absent from the life of the Kingdom. To relinquish them eventually is also a necessity for salvation. Thus the Christian community cannot assert the value of possessions, of marriage, of autonomy to the point where their opposites would seem worthless. Neither can the Christian community exalt poverty, celibacy and obedience to the point where goodness of possessions, of spouse, and of autonomy might seem to be denied. One of these is good in view of the journey, the other is good in view of the destination. One has root in the present as leading to the future, the other has root in the future as already upon us. As with so many other elements in the mystery of salvation, the prior enactment of the future before it comes has its proper place in the present. Proclamation of the two-sided truth of Man's progress to the Kingdom is part of the public Christian good. Hence the need for a distinction of public states of life.

The reason for practising the evangelical counsels does not lie in any pessimistic belief that the life of business, marriage and independence is in any way evil. It is not true that life in the world must be set aside by those who would seek a truly spiritual life. Neither is that view of evangelical counsels correct which grants the goodness of these activities but asserts the dangers inherent in them. In this view, life in the world, while not evil, is an obstruction in the path of salvation. It is true that life in the world is not without its dangers. Possessions can lead to greed. Marital love can fall away into lust. The enjoyment of independence can lead to pride. But the proper conclusion to draw when the dangerous is also good, is that those who pursue this good must do so with care. We cannot conclude merely on account of danger that it would be more virtuous to relinquish the pursuit of these goods. In any case, it is equally true that poverty, chastity, and obedience can become obstacles on the road to perfection inasmuch as they too can be vitiated by abuse.

To sum up, the meaning of practising the evangelical counsels is not that life in the world is evil, not that it is good

but dangerous, not that it is good but God is better, but that action in the world, though good, does not suffice to bring the world to completion. A readiness to let go must also be expressed. While no humanism can be called Christian which neglects to answer the call to social justice and world-building, neither can any humanism be called Christian which stops there.

The consecrated life is a state of perfection in the sense that in the public domain it more closely resembles the perfected state of the kingdom towards which we are all called. The consecrated life is not a state of perfection in the sense that people within it are expected to do a better job of living *their* state than the ordinary laity are expected to do in living *theirs*.

As regards consecration to God, the evangelical counsels are *means*. They are not an *end* in themselves; they enable a life leading to perfection by helping us avoid the major obstacles to its realization, the three concupiscences: that of the flesh, that of the eyes, that of the spirit (1 Jn 2:16). Hence they are also the sign and expression of charity and consecration to God.

Upto this point of consecration the dimensions of religious vocation and those of the S.I. members are the same. It is in the next step that their paths diverge, namely, in the area of sacralization.

II. Distinction between sacralized consecration and non-sacralized consecration (secularity)

We used to use the one word "consecration" for both consecration and sacralization. But these two need to be distinguished. Consecration differs from sacralization. When we sacralize something, we set it apart exclusively to God, withdrawing it from ordinary profane uses. Consecration, as a deeply personal directing of one's life and person to God, does not necessarily set one apart from secular life nor withdraw one from secular activities, but directs this life and these activities according to the divine plan. Sacralization is a symbolic expression of consecration. The sacralized is that which we surround with an aura of holiness because through its mediation we experience God, or endeavour to enter into, or deepen, communion with him. The sacralized is something associated with the divine.

Sacralization is a very human procedure. All of us tend to associate certain places or persons or things with the deep experiences we have had in connection with them. Man needs sacred persons and things and places to mediate the divine to him because God is so infinitely transcendent, so totally the Other from all creation that Man is unable to have immediate experience of him in this life (1 Tim 6:16; Acts 17:27-28).

Things or persons are sacralized or set apart for God as means of making all things holy, as means of consecrating everything to God. Thus, in ancient Israel, the first fruits of the crop and of the flock, and the first-born of every family were sacralized, declared sacred to the Lord. But this was in reality a symbolic action. The sacralization of the first born of each family signified and acknowledged that the whole people of God was God's family, consecrated to him. The sacralization of the first-fruits was a sign and pledge that the whole crop, and the land and human labour from which it sprang, belonged to the Lord.

There can be persons who are both consecrated as well as sacralized. That is, at least in some areas of their life they can be set apart from the ordinary ways of secular life, that they might be signs to themselves and to others of profound religious realities. The more important reality in this case, however, is not the sacralization or sign value, but the positive reality signified, the total, willing belonging of this person to God, the consecration of this person to him in a direct personal relationship, a living communion with him in love. The sign value or witness of a sacralized person is only in proportion to this deeper reality of his dynamic, living consecration, the actual belonging to God in active, effective faith and love⁹.

While the religious are both consecrated as well as sacralized persons, the S.I. members are merely consecrated persons. The realm of the religious is sacralized consecration; that of the S.I. members is non-sacralized consecration. The sacralization of the religious calls for a certain withdrawal from the world while the non-sacralization of the S.I. members demands insertion into the world. Being task forces of eschatological witness, the religious work on the world but from outside the world, whereas the members of S.Is, though they are conse-

erated wholly and with equal zeal to the same end, work on the world from within the world. The religious, in so far as they are sacralized, are expected to have a certain "separation from the world" proper to the character and purpose of each institute. Indeed, they are often readily identifiable as "Church people" even though they may not wear a habit or clerical garb. Their community lifestyle, and corporate apostolate, in one sense, sets them apart and "separates" them from the ordinary lifestyle of lay people.

As Emilio Tresalti observes, this characteristic of religious life, even though it has the positive aspect of focusing on the supreme eschatological values, can — and indeed did — give rise to a certain abandonment of the world by virtue of the fact that it was not accompanied by the birth of another form of life that was more in keeping with the needs of the world⁷. It was in this situation that there began in the Church a new ferment not to lose the essential riches of the value represented by religious life, the intense search for God, but to combine these riches with the presence in the world in order to help the world to develop according and within a search for God.

In other words, an attempt was made — not by means of compromise but in a manner desired by God — to reconcile the search for him with the search for an order of the things of the world or, in other words to reconcile the search for God in the world with an attempt to realize the world in God and according to the plan of God. The result was S.I.s that combine these two realities: an essential consecration to God that goes beyond the baptismal consecration and a fully secular form of life. In other words, there came into being a secular consecration (or a secular state of perfection), that is to say, a permanent way of life that still sought God as the absolute value, but sought him in the human realities and made every effort to bring these human realities into the order desired by God.

Secular Institutes give expression to the secularity of the Church: a secularity that is at once consecrated and effective of consecration. By the phrase "secularity of the Church", we move away from matters mundane and turn our gaze on to the mystery of the Incarnate Christ: "The word was made flesh".

In this movement of condescension, what was never sacred is consecrated, sanctified, vivified, lifted up, redeemed, purified, healed and set free. The Incarnation of the Word brings forth a "consecrated worldliness" which is Jesus Christ himself: God and man. And every man in Christ is holy, consecrated, deified. Every man in Christ has the power to become one who sanctifies, consecrates, divinizes the world around him. He can fulfil his God-given mandate to bring the world into its fulness by his knowledge and husbandry.

Secularity as the expression of the stooping of the Incarnation of the Word, cannot be other than a characteristic note of the Church in her entirety and also as she exists in each one of her members. The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World is witness to it⁸.

It is here that the Church elaborates and articulates her mission, through her ministries and by means of many different graces. Some of these ministries are underpinned by a special sacrament which distils and gives shape to baptismal grace and is rooted in the character imparted by baptism itself. Such is ordination in its threefold form of episcopate, priesthood, and diaconate, or marriage which gives strength to the ministry of parenthood. There are other functions which receive their Christ-like form from baptism and confirmation; these are the various ministries of the unordained and the functions of the laity. These latter find their immediate and direct expression in secularity, in the strict sense of the word, as described in the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church. It is in this sense, also, that secularity can be called the proper characteristic of the laity even as is the consecration of the world.

We cannot say that secularity finds its primary expression in hierarchy or in the ministries of the ordained and unordained. Rather it is seen to be the attribute of the lay function, characteristic of the laity. One cannot deny that the laity too have their ecclesial speciality or that there is a special attribute enriching the Church in its mission to the world — a secular mission, in fact. To do so would be to equiparate the Church with its hierarchy, to alienate the Church from the world.

The precise task of S.Is is to effect the synthesis of secu-

larity and consecration, so that the resulting consecrated secularity might itself become a consecrating force. By living according to the style of the S.Is a Christian takes up the Church's secularity in the same way as every lay person. To consecrate oneself over in this way continually and whole-heartedly with a definitive ecclesial pledge in a life-commitment where this worldly mission assumes a moral tone which resonates in the consciousness of the ecclesial community as well as in the heart of the person, is indeed a special vocation.

Work, management of temporal affairs, the organization of society, the building up of the earthly city and dynamic nature of history, all of which for the lay person is the stuff of consecration insofar as it assimilates him to Christ and makes him an instrument of Christ: all this is certainly special since it raises him to a level of self-awareness and self-acceptance that is free and deliberate. This is what we mean by "secularity" of the members of S.Is⁹.

But in the opinion of Jean Beyer the term "secularity" remains sadly open to ambiguity since there are so many diverse associations approved by the Church as S.Is¹⁰. How different is this form of consecration from that which declares its presence in the world by means of the ministry of the word, by a poverty of renunciation which assimilates a person to the materially deprived — the Little Brothers and Sisters of Jesus, for example? They all are in the world in one way or another; they are not strangers to it.

When we look around we see that one S.I. has retained community life, with an observance of poverty even stricter than that which Church law obliges the religious congregations. Another has kept the whole apparatus of the religious life, the habit alone excepted. This is a far cry from "secularity". Yet another Institute has its own special works, its hospitals, its schools and colleges in which the members reside and work. Where then is the real difference from the life of the religious? Is it after all only a question of words? It is true that they speak of private vows rather than public vows. They do not wear the religious habit. Nevertheless, they keep all the observances of convent life. The problem is made still more complicated by the fact that there arose S.Is of diocesan priests and also other Institutes of both priests and layfolk.

All the religious are in the world in one way or another. However, their relationship with it is certainly different in tone and temper. The ecclesial attributes of secularity — consecration — is incarnated and lived out in different modes in the coherent structures and functions of the Church. It is clear, then, that the way in which the evangelical counsels are understood in the various forms of ecclesial life will differ in accord with its diversity.

Considering the different trends among the various S.Is, we may distinguish between Institutes which pursue their ends by means of *co-operative effort* and those which commit their members to penetration of the secular environment. The first kind allows for a more organized and public apostolate, which has a specific purpose, and which all the members or at least the majority are obliged to follow. With the exception of their lay attire and their manner of residence, which is more akin to that of people in the world, they approach very closely the more simple type of religious institutes. Speaking generally, one may say that certain religious congregations seem more "secular" than some of the S.Is who engage in works of co-operative effort.

When we turn to consider, on the other hand, those S.Is which seek to penetrate the world about them, we note that they have no community life; their members live in separation, but united in a spiritual fraternity which is no hindrance to any form of professional work they may follow and which embraces all ranks of society. "The special apostolate of such Institutes is to insert themselves into the world merely by being present in it by professional competence, by friendly contact with those around them and mutual help. The Christian witness which they give is that of a truly human life, an apostolate of simply being what they are. This kind of life draws much closer to the life of the world, and even identifies itself fully with it to such an extent that no distinction is made in everyday life between layfolk consecrated to God and other Christians.

Such a manner of being present in the world enables these Institutes to have a daily and unceasing contact with all Men in every social environment, in every type of work, in all pro-

fessions and in all circumstances. It can operate equally well in peace as in war, in times of persecution as in times when Christians can take their full part in public life. It allows easy relations between Christians and non-Christians. It makes possible even a discreet apostolate among non-believers and in circles which are indifferent or hostile to the Church. The "apostolate of penetration" seems to correspond best to the ideal proposed in the words of Pius XII: an "apostolate in the world and by means of the world"¹¹.

There is a difficulty with regard to the S.Is of priests. We cannot say that the "apostolate of penetration" belongs properly to priests. Their ministry is public, and their kind of life is so clearly distinguished from that of the simple faithful that one may well ask in what way they could participate in an apostolate of secularity. Some even think that because the Church has given approval to Institutes of clerics, the special law governing S.Is has lost its character of being fully "secular". But this does not seem to be true.

We must see what kind of priestly Institutes have asked to be approved as S.Is. First of all, here are the Institutes of diocesan priests who wish to live a life of the evangelical counsels, in order to correspond with greater fidelity to the call to more perfect life. There are other Institutes which bring together both priests and layfolk with the aim of closer collaboration in the service of the dioceses.

Other Institutes make provision for participation by priests in a more unobtrusive way. In them future clerics are given their training by the Institutes; not only do they receive a theological formation but they also choose a civil profession. For a certain period they exercise their profession in the world and are ordained to the priesthood only later. Once they are priests they continue to exercise their civil profession whether it be as a doctor, a lawyer an engineer, or a manual worker. Although they are priests, they perform a secular function, an apostolate which consists in being competent in their profession and in taking their place in the world about them.

There is no doubt that this priestly apostolate deserves to be considered as fully "secular" in the fullest sense. It enables the priest to reach circles into which he could hardly

find his way as an ordinary priest. It makes it possible for him to have easy and natural relations with the laity on the level of human and professional life. It allows him to bring the help of his priestly ministry into this sphere of human activity at the moment when it is most needed. Here we may recognize an outstanding example of an apostolate of "belonging to the world".

III. Implications of the consecrated secularity of Secular Institutes

A. Implications of consecration

a. Secular Institutes as a state of perfection

Joseph-Marie Perrin has the following to say in this regard¹². Christianity is essentially a vocation to the perfection of love. Not merely did Our Lord demand of all his followers without exception that they should be perfect as their heavenly Father is perfect, but they realized from the outset that this was to be taken literally, not just as an ideal, but as something universally obligatory, and also through his help, universally possible even to finite creatures in a fallen state. However such a programme might come to be interpreted in detail, it was obviously a very exacting one, and the brute facts of daily life in those early centuries fully bore this out. Baptism in those days was often a prelude to martyrdom. It involved the neophyte straight away in conscious and deliberate self-preparation for that supreme testimony to his belief in Christ. It is a characteristic of these early ages that although Christians might fail, might apostatize, they could not and did not formulate a theory of mediocrity. Christianity in itself could not but appear to them as something which demanded a total self-commitment on the part of all its adherents. The forces of persecution itself served in part to keep it alive. When after the Constantinian Peace of the Church a way of living was worked out and in spite of the manifest advantages which accrued to the Church, this vision began to fade. It was this that necessitated a vigorous re-statement of the Christian vocation in the form of special consecration in monasticism.

A principle of a Christian vocation is its necessary stability or permanence. The goal of perfection placed before his disciples by Our Lord is universal in several senses. Not only

does it refer to all members of the Church without exception, to the groups mentioned above, and to all the rest who remain outside these groups as well. But it also makes a thorough-going demand on each individual, a total demand for all his energies and for all his time. It immediately turns all the rest of his life, long or short, into a constant effort after perfection. His life becomes a tendency towards this goal which ought to be reached this side of death. When groups of persons are formed with this life-long tendency towards perfection chiefly in mind, there is at least unofficially what may be termed a "state of perfection"; when in the course of time the Church singles out certain of these states we have the *juridical* states of perfection. There are in fact only three of them — the religious state, that of the societies of common life and that of Secular Institutes.

By a "state of perfection" we mean "the state of perfection still to be acquired", or "the state of striving for perfection". It is a state of life that implies an association of faithful (whether clerics or layfolk) who declare their intention of striving towards the perfection of charity in the Church by a life which embraces the three evangelical counsels. Any other organized state of perfection in which the members bind themselves to the practice of some but not all of the counsels or merely intend to live according to the spirit of the counsels, or engage themselves to some acts of perfection only, will never be considered to be a state of perfection except in a loose sense of the term. Thus the state of perfection is always a *social* state in the Church. We can see that this is so from a consideration of the important place that fraternal fellowship and obedient submission have in the consecrated life. This distinction that some have tried to introduce between the *canonical* and *moral* state of perfection is useful but conceals more than one ambiguity for the official Church. The moral state of perfection may be defined as the personal situation of one who strives to practise perfect charity; but in saying this we are not defining the *means* for practising it or for ensuring that it will be permanent and definitive practice. One may well be in a "moral state" of perfection even if married; the belonging to a canonical state of perfection implies the practice of the counsels and at least the tacit approval by the hierarchy of this social state in the Church.

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If then we restrict ourselves to the sense of the term which has been adopted by the Church in her legislation, we must conclude that two elements are essential to this state: first, the striving for Christian perfection, i.e., perfection of charity, and secondly the practice of the three evangelical counsels.

Canonists, moreover, consider recognition by the Church a constitutive element of the juridical or canonical state of perfection. It is the "formal" element which, according to the Church law, informs the "material" elements of this state, namely, the striving towards perfection, the practice of the three evangelical counsels, and the social link binding the members of the group who want to live in that state.

When Pius XII declared that S. Is are a state of perfection recognized by the Church, he would have us understand that the essential element of the vocation which is to be lived out by them consists in tending to perfect love and he guarantees that in them are to be found the necessary conditions to realize such an idea — an offering of the whole life to God and his kingdom, effective support on the part of the superiors and total application to the activities of charity and the evangelical counsels.

After the training period the new members of the S. I. make the promises that render their dedication to God an unqualified, full-time commitment. The promises establish them in a state of perfection and a way of life in which they must strive for perfection.

The question is often asked as to why S. I. members should not go the whole way and become brothers or sisters, if they wish to attain perfection. This question misses the point on several counts. For one thing, the member of an S. I. does go the whole way, for his vocation too is a full-time commitment to God and brethren. S. Is are a form of an all-out apostolate different from that of the religious life. S. Is are a different vocation from that of the religious life. The interests and aptitudes for one need not be the requisite qualities for the other.

b. Secular Institutes as a third state of perfection

Jean Beyer explains admirably well the various states of perfection adorning the Catholic Church¹³. Up to the late for-

ties, it was customary to put the members of the Church into two neat divisions: Those who "left the world", and those who "stayed with it". The "world-leavers" were those who entered seminaries, monasteries and convents. The "stayers" were all others who somehow had to do with the things in the world, where staying good — not to mention getting better — called for nothing short of heroism. For many centuries the only form of life recognized by the Church as life consecrated to God was the religious life.

At the promulgation of *Provida Mater*, Pius XII recognized at least three forms of consecrated life in the Church, three ways for Christians to practise the life of perfection by the observance of the evangelical counsels, under the guidance of the Church. These forms are: the religious life, societies of common life and secular institutes.

1) Religious life is organized in the Church in a public manner. In fact Christians may be not only clerics or laymen, they may also be religious. Clerics and laymen are distinguished by their difference in hierarchical grade, while the difference between the religious and the seculars is determined by the difference in the manner in which they practise the evangelical counsels. The Christian who practises the counsels as a state of life in a religious institute approved by the Church is a religious. In practice, in the past, this Christian was forsaking the "secular" world; he was separating himself from the world and from the Christian community. This flight from the world has been observed right upto our own times at least in the practice of enclosure, which is kept by the different religious institutes in a greater or less degree of strictness. Even when the religious is fully dedicated to the apostolate, this link, which may be called historical, with the life of the desert, is still a mark of the doctrinal conception of religious life. Secular Institutes, on the contrary, bring back the consecrated life to a position better adapted and more corresponding to every-day reality.

2) Societies of common life are but a stage of the long adaptation of canon law for the religious to the necessities of the apostolate. To prevent too rigorous an enclosure, they decide not to pronounce solemn vows; but they still desire to be "religious". Thus they try to imitate religious life in the spi-

ritual sense of the word, without binding themselves to the requirements of the religious life which canon law lays down for regulars. Exteriorly, their communal poverty and even personal poverty are not very apparent. The choral office is not always undertaken.

3) It was the need for an even greater adaptation to the apostolate especially at the time of the French Revolution that spurred on the religious who had been expelled from their convents, and Christians who had been prevented from entering religious life to organize themselves in new religious associations. Though kept secret for a long time, they were by no means unknown to the ecclesiastical authorities; they were approved by them and their bonds of commitment were received in the name of the Church. This provisional arrangement, exceptional though it was, revealed itself so useful to the apostolate that it became a special form of consecrated life, approved today as the third state of perfection, namely, that of the S.Is.

Families must be re-christianized; professions, trades and services must be revitalized with apostolic spirit; offices, factories and industry must be penetrated by values that are abiding. This challenge of re-creating the world comes within the purview of every Christian in the world. However, there is scope here for fully dedicated apostles. There is scope for a way of life in which one dedicates one's whole energy to the work in the world. The answer is the Secular Institute.

c. Similarity between secular institutes and religious congregations

We can distinguish Christians into two categories, the ordained (clerics) and the non-ordained (the laity). Clerics and the laity are distinguished by their differences in hierarchical grade. Another way of distinguishing Christians is by dividing them into the categories of the consecrated and the non-consecrated according as they have undertaken or not publicly to practise the evangelical counsels. The consecrated are subdivided into the consecrated-sacralized (religious) and the consecrated-non-sacralized (secular institute members) according as they are "withdrawn" from the world or inserted into the world.

Basically, religious life is Christian life. The religious and the laity are not different in that sense. The very fact that religious life is not a separate sacramental state suggests that religious life is not **distinct** from the fundamental vocation of all Christians. Instead it is the highest intensification of that vocation. The religious are called to the deepest living-out of the generic vocation of all Christians. So are the S.I. members. While the religious are called to the highest intensification of the Christian vocation through a certain amount of withdrawal from the world, the S.I. members are called to do so through insertion into the world. Only the method of intensification of Christian life seems to be different. The religious are distinct from the laity through their sacralized consecration, whereas the S.I. members are distinct from them through their non-sacralized consecration.

We ought to maintain the essential unity of the religious and the S.I.s. Basically, both are forms of consecrated Christian life. The essential is not the form of the commitment but the commitment itself. It is not taking the vows that is the most important element, but rather the evangelical counsels themselves, inasmuch as they are means of perfection and sign of a yet deeper consecration. Basically, this is a more profitable way of considering the manifold expressions of the consecrated life than by insisting on the difference between them. It is a principle of the greatest importance in considering the development of the S.I.s, which though legally outside the religious state, are nonetheless theologically within it, while from the historical point of view the full story of neither can be told without reference to the other.

B. Implications of secularity

a. Distinction between secular institutes and religious congregations

We draw on the rewarding studies of Jean Beyer and David O'Connor on this matter¹⁴. In view of the historical development of the S.I.s, it is scarcely to be wondered at if some of the Institutes and their members adopted a view of their vocation which was rather too dependent upon the ideas of religious life. According to this conception the Secular Institute was in some respects a substitute for the 'real thing'—

a surrogate for the canonical religious life. Indeed, one still meets a number of good people who imagine that his newly recognized vocation is only a second best choice for those who have failed to be religious, or been forced by health or other circumstances to opt for something equivalent. While firmly pointing out how inadequate and false such a conception is, we must be prepared to admit that ample excuses may be found for it in the literature prior to 1947, and, to a certain degree, even in the text of *Provida Mater* itself. The main importance of *Primo Feliciter* is to make such an attitude impossible in future. There was, for instance, a tendency on the part of some members of Secular Institutes, to claim the title of religious, without paying any attention to the distinction between the substance and the juridical status of religious life in the structure of the Church. They were rather too willing, sometimes, to accept for themselves such popular and sensational notions as that they were "nuns without habit", etc. Sometimes this notion was exteriorized by the creation of a species of religious habit, contemporary and "functional", but still somehow recognized as an intention to claim religious status. In some cases, at least a sort of "choir-habit" was occasionally donned in their common liturgy.

It would be entirely wrong to assimilate members of Secular Institutes to the religious life and it would be wrong, imprudent, and out of keeping for them to seek to imitate religious life and to give up their secular character. Secular Institutes form a body of dedicated persons, they constitute a state of perfection, it is true, but they have a special end, their own form, and the means which lead to this end and are in conformity with this state can only be their own as well. For the Secular Institutes, to forget their conditions of secularity and of presence in the world would be to change their very nature, their soul, and to perish. They are not a branch of religious life, but a new creation which though it is the result of an evolution remains new nonetheless and providential for our times.

We see the difficulty of defining the secular vocation from the fact that some religious congregations have undertaken a way of life and apostolate which is decidedly "secular".

They have even decided to forgo any direct apostolate, however flexible, and to restrict themselves to an apostolate of "simple presence", e.g., the Little Brothers and Little Sisters of Jesus. In these congregations, the life of presence in the world becomes above all a contemplative one. They practise more solitary prayer, but right in the midst of profane environment: they seek to influence others by the silent example of their work in factories and elsewhere, by their life of sacrifice and of charity, by their spirit of fraternal helpfulness. Such a presence in the world is not really the same as that of the essentially apostolic Secular Institute. The latter, indeed, has as its ruling motive the desire to penetrate into the midst of circles which have lost the Christian ideal, and indeed may be hostile to the Church. It aims to exert an influence on the environment by professional skill and technical means.

Here there are two types of "presence in the world". The first of the type which Pius XII described in 1958, is compatible with a truly monastic life. The second expresses an apostolic ideal of a different type. The latter form of life cannot accept restriction of professional action any more than it can be reconciled with a practice of long solitary prayer. On the contrary, it demands a special spirituality better adapted to the environment and to the profession undertaken. It is easy to see, then, that this second type of "presence in the world" is more difficult to put into practice than the former. The former, namely, the monastic type of secularity, expresses itself clearly enough in a flight from the world while the *apostolic* type of secularity has to put into practice in a way that combines the life of evangelical counsels, with life in the midst of the world, a life that means taking one's full place in one's social sphere in order to bear Christian witness there by professional competence and a spirit of friendship.

The connection of S.Is with religious congregations is obvious. The essential common elements are the practice of the three evangelical counsels, the consecration to God and the "ecclesial meaning" of that consecrated life. Besides, some were founded by religious, are directed by religious or at least claim to share the spiritual teaching of some particular religious congregation: some are actually affiliated to orders and congregations as oblates or tertiaries.

Relevance of S.Is does not mean that the religious life has not kept its youthfulness and its suitability for presentday conditions. S.Is have not arisen as a result of decadence or inadaptability of the religious life, but they spring from the youthful nature of the Church which is ever quickened by the Spirit which has been given her. The S.Is are not a juridical adaptation of an old form, but a new work of charity, a work of the Holy Spirit.

b. Secularity to be lived faithfully

The members of S.Is must really be secular. Were they to lose their secular character, or even appear to lose it, they would cease being the "leaven in the dough". We can't help referring to a sort of crisis in some S.Is. For these are secular only in name. They live like religious. Such Institutes should question themselves anew as to the meaning of their consecration and the nature of their mission in the Church and make a choice. Either they should become genuine S.Is or declare themselves one among the many modern religious adapted to the times.

Secularity is what colours the way of life of S.Is and constitutes the most significant characteristic of their consecrated life. This has been stressed over and again in all the ecclesiastical documents addressing the nature and activity of S.Is. Just going to the world every now and again to witness to the kingdom of God or giving some good example does not suffice for S.Is. They are to live their consecrated life exactly in the same situation as other lay people. Those who lead such a life follow literally what Vatican II says about the laity. It is good to note that what Vatican II says about the laity is a contribution S.Is have made to the theology of the laity. The very things that were said about S.Is before Vatican II are those we find incorporated into the teaching of the council regarding the laity.

Hence S.Is must exclude everything which would differentiate them from the ordinary lot of the people. Natural ties with family, relatives and neighbours are part of the secular state of life. Not less secular is interest in professional as well as social progress, in trade union matters and political affairs. Political allegiance too comes under this category.

Needless to add that if these dedicated persons are to find their holiness in their daily life, they are to take equally seriously, if not more, their consecration to God. They can be sure that in calling them to sanctity by this way, the Lord has provided in it all that they need.

Conclusion

Secular Institutes are certainly in a process of evolution. They are to take their consecration and their secular mission seriously, both on their own and on God's terms. The future of S.Is cannot be assured unless they remain what God wants them to be: truly consecrated and truly secular in the sense of being responsible for christianizing the secular order from within. If they remain faithful to their vocation for consecrated secularity, they can be expected to contribute significantly to the spiritual renovation of the world.

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Footnotes

- 1 *Primo Feliciter*, n. 5
- 2 *Provida Mater*, n. 10
- 3 *Primo Feliciter*, nn. 2-3
- 4 Paul Hinnebusch, *Secular Holiness*, Denville, 1971, pp.19-25
- 5 James O'Reilly, "Lay and Religious States of Life. Their Distinction and Complementarity", *Review for Religious*, 27 (1968) pp. 1027-1052
- 6 P. Hinnebusch, *Secular Holiness*, pp. 32-47
- 7 Emilio Tresalti, "Secular Consecration," in; *Asian Conference of Secular Institutes*, Pune, 1976, pp. 25-34
- 8 *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 40
- 9 Emilio Tresalti, "The Identity of the Secular Institute", *The Way*, 33 (1978) pp. 133-140
- 10 Jean Beyer, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, Rome, 1970
- 11 *Primo Feliciter*, n. 11
- 12 Joseph-Marie Perrin, *Secular Institutes*, London, 1961, pp. 48-51
- 13 J. Beyer, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, pp. 9-24
- 14 Jean Beyer, *Religious Life or Secular Institute*, pp. 52-153; David O'Connor, "Two Forms of Consecrated Life: Religious and Secular Institutes", *Review for Religious*, 45 (1986) pp. 205-218

